

THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS SYMBOLS
IN THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION OF 1979

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This thesis will analyze the role of Shī'ī religious symbols employed in the Iranian revolution of 1979. During the revolution, the Shī'ī symbolic structure of the Karbalā' paradigm or the symbols of Karbalā' and of Ḥusayn's martyrdom were extensively employed to mobilize the masses. Regarded as the Imām and as the symbol of the revolution, Khumaynī extensively utilized such religious symbols in order to generate mass revolutionary political consciousness against the Shah's tyrannical régime. In other words, throughout the revolution the traditional 'āshūrā' mourning ceremony — commemorating a tragic historical event the martyrdom of Ḥusayn who was killed on the battlefield of Karbalā' on Muḥarram 10, 60/680 — was transformed into and politicized to be a vehicle of mass revolutionary political mobilization.

R é s u m é

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Ce mémoire se propose d'analyser le rôle des symboles religieux Chī'ītes utilisés durant la révolution iranienne de 1979. Durant la révolution, la structure symbolique Chī'īte du paradigme de Karbalā' ou des symboles de Karbalā' et du martyr de Ḥusayn ont été abondamment employés pour mobiliser les masses. Khumaynī, considéré comme l'Imām et comme le symbole de la révolution, a utilisé abondamment de tels symboles religieux afin de produire une conscience politique révolutionnaire des masses, et cela, contre le régime tyrannique du Shah. En d'autres mots, tout au long de la révolution, la cérémonie traditionnelle de deuil de l'āshūrā' — commémorant l'événement historique du martyr de Ḥusayn tué à la bataille de Karbalā', le 10 du mois de Muḥarram de l'an 60/680 — a été politisé et transformé en un véhicule de mobilisation politique révolutionnaire.

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N.F.

T r a n s l i t e r a t i o n

The Arabic-to-English transliteration system applied in this thesis follows that of the Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, as shown in the scheme below.

ا = a	ز = z	ق = q
ب = b	س = s	ك = k
ت = t	ش = sh	ل = l
ث = th	ص = ṣ	م = m
ج = j	ظ = ḍ	ن = n
ح = ḥ	ط = ṭ	ه = h
خ = kh	ظ = ḍ	ه = h (t)
د = d	ع = ʿ	و = w (ū)
ذ = dh	غ = gh	ي = y (ī)
ر = r	ف = f	ق = ʿ

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I. I n t r o d u c t i o n

This study will analyze the role of religious symbols in the Iranian revolution of 1979. To do so, I would like to apply a functional approach, which I consider to be proper for describing such a role. This approach is derived from functional theory. According to this theory, "religious rites and beliefs perform certain positive functions related to social or personal problems that cause the participants to adhere to them, whether or not they are consciously aware of the full effects and the importance of these effects."¹ With respect to this theory, Comstock has pointed out:

This suggestion presupposes that human action is complex and ambiguous, and reveals both conscious and unconscious dimensions in which different sets of motivation apply. A person or social group may perform an action with a certain goal in mind, but really value and reinforce the act for other purposes.²

In addition, according to this theory, religious rites and beliefs contain manifest and latent functions. "Manifest functions are the purpose of an act as the actors themselves understand and express them; the latent functions are the result of the act which are unknown to or neglected by the actors but which determine the real value of the act and the need for its repetitions."³

Thus, this functional approach strives to comprehend both the manifest and the latent functions of the religious symbols employed in the Iranian revolution of 1979. In terms of the 'āshūrā' mourning ritual, for example, its manifest function — as the Shī'ī community understand and express it — is to commemorate a tragic historical event the martyrdom of Ḥusayn who was killed in the battlefield of Karbalā' on Muharram 10, 60/680. In addition, more than a commemorative ceremony, on the level of popular religion the 'āshūrā' mourning ritual is also understood as an integral part of — or at least regarded as — Shī'ī religious doctrine.

Furthermore, in the course of Shī'ī history the latent functions of this ritual, which in turn created the symbol of Karbalā' and Ḥusayn's martyrdom, may be seen, for instance, in the way they have been applied to create a social integration which is institutionalized through the ta'ziyeh ritual. In the course of the Iranian revolution of 1979, Karbalā' and Ḥusayn's martyrdom played a central part as religious symbols of the revolution. In addition, in the context of the revolution the symbols of Karbalā' and of Ḥusayn's martyrdom served sociopolitical functions by generating

political consciousness of social deprivation and discontent leading to revolt against the dictatorial government of the Shah.

In the annals of twentieth century revolutionary history no other revolution has attracted so great concern in the eyes of social scientists and international political analysts as has the Iranian revolution of 1979 which represented a unique phenomenon. In contrast to the Russian and the Chinese revolutions, for example, in which "class conflicts — especially between peasants and landlords — were pivotal during the revolutionary interregnum,"⁴ "the Iranian revolution lacked peasant participation until the final stage: even then, peasants were never essential to the downfall of the régime."⁵

Moreover, the Iranian revolution differed from "the revolution from above carried out in Kemalist Turkey, Egypt after 1952, and Syria and Iraq after 1958."⁶ Another aspect of the uniqueness of the Iranian revolution has been stated by Abrahamian: "In fact, the Islamic revolution is unique in the annals of modern world history in that it brought to power not a new social group equipped with political parties and secular ideologies, but a traditional clergy armed with mosque pulpits and claiming the divine right to supervise all temporal

authorities, even the country's highest elected representatives."⁷

Despite the Iranian revolution's being unique, to a certain degree, it seems also to have been categorized as a Third World revolution, in which the major characteristic is "the failure of capitalism as a model for balanced development."⁸ Third World revolutions may take the form of socialist or middle-class uprisings caused by social demands for political participation and socioeconomic justice. In addition, such revolutions may also occur as a severe reaction to liberate nationalistic interests from dependency on imperialism and on a strong longing to revive and to return to an indigenous culture or even weltanschauung. Once capitalism and socialism have lost their influence and legitimacy to provide a viable solution to problems, middle-class revolutions have become a major alternative. These revolutions are brought about by a "broad coalition of popular forces under the leadership of the middle-class intelligentsia; such revolutions often adopt an indigenous ideology and are predominantly nationalistic in nature."⁹ Applying this theoretical framework to analyze the Iranian revolution, Amirahmadi has pointed out:

The Iranian revolution is a case in point. Implementation of the capitalist growth model between the 1950s and 1970s generated poverty, income and spatial concentration, uneven sectoral development, dependency, cultural destruction, denationalization, and dictatorship. In conjunction with memories of the Shah's illegitimate return to power with the help of the CIA in 1953 and his despotic methods of governing for more than thirty years, the problem led to the speedy loss of the legitimacy of the status quo for the majority. Coupled with a complex of other historical, sociocultural, economic, and political factors (particularly the long and continued legacy of revolutionary political activism), the system's illegitimacy fueled the revolutionary movement....¹⁰

In point of fact, as Skocpol says, the Shah was much more powerful than the absolute monarchs of the old régimes in France, Russia, and China, for he was equipped with a thoroughly modernized army and a powerful secret police force. "Yet the Shah's state was much less rooted, less embedded in society — especially rural society — than the 'agrarian bureaucracies' of prerevolutionary France, Russia, and China."¹¹ Despite the fact that the Shah had a modernized army, it could not protect him from overthrow by the mass revolutionary forces of the Iranian revolution of 1979. The major reason for his army's incapability to protect him is that the Shah, as an absolute monarch, centralized all state decisions — about both internal and foreign policies — in his own hands.

The Shah's absolutist mode of government caused the military forces to be paralyzed in performing their

major function of securing the country at the time when the Shah left Iran in January, 1979. His generals did not know what they should do, whether or not to takeover the power by military coup d'état in order to save the government. In the meantime, however, their concern was how to secure themselves from the revolutionary forces when Khumaynī returned. Consequently they reached a consensus: "The Shah's departure had to be stopped; if he left Iran, all of them wanted to go with him."¹² Whether they actually went with their monarch or not, this account shows that the Shah's military officers lacked the experience to make major political decisions on their own. In addition, Shahpur Bakhtiyar, the last Prime Minister of the Shah, failed to consolidate his power. In this situation, "the chief of general staff announced that the military would not take sides in the struggle between Bakhtiyar and the revolutionary Council."¹³ About this situation Keddie says: "The unexpectedly rapid march of events and the continuing indecisiveness of the Shah forestalled any possibility of a coup and paved the way for Khomeini's accession in February 1979."¹⁴

So far as the middle class was concerned, the emergence of 'Alī Shari'atī as the ideologue of the Iranian revolution¹⁵ represented the revolutionary

leadership of the middle class intelligentsia. After Shari'atī's death in 1977, his supporters among the students and young intelligentsia endorsed Khomeynī's leadership. Despite the fact that the Iranian revolution was supported by a cross-class based movement, its strongest basis was the traditional middle class, notably the bazaaris and the 'ulamā'. As modern Iranian history shows, "the bazaars had social, financial, political, ideology, and historical links with the religious establishment."¹⁶ In terms of the bazaar-'ulamā' religio-political relationship, the 'ulamā' had become the leaders and symbols of social protest against the political status quo of the régime. In the course of the uprising of 1963, the 'ulamā' — supported by their traditional ally (the bazaars) — for example, organized numerous demonstrations. Such a religio-political relationship provided all over again a strong social basis for the revolution of 1979. In addition, throughout the revolution the 'ulamā' endeavored to politicize the Shī'ī symbolic structure of the Karbalā' paradigm in order to generate mass revolutionary consciousness. Thus inspite of the fact that the Iranian revolution was social, economic, and political in nature, its ideology was based on Shī'ī traditional cultural values which, in turn, served as

revolutionary religious symbols. One may argue, as does Parsa, that "antigovernment forces mobilized through the mosque not because of ideological consensus, but because government repression had left no other option."¹⁷ However, one may not contradict that the religious symbols were employed extensively in the course of the revolution as vehicles of mass mobilization and religious legitimacy.

Furthermore, following the capitalist economic policy which tended to undermine petty shopkeepers, on the one hand, and facing a national economic crisis, on the other, from 1975 the Shah's economic policies suppressed the bazaaris and put them under control of the state. In the meantime, the government — launching rapid modernization programs from the 1960s combined with a secularization process — made the political policy anti-religious establishment. These rapid social changes not only generated an anomie within the lower religious class, but also created strong reaction from bazaaris, primarily from the 'ulamā', against the Shah's régime. In addition, the centralized government, equipped with its fascist-style-totalitarian methods, paralyzed all sociopolitical institutions of the community and alienated the modern middle class from the state. The only social institutions that remained autonomous from

the state were madrasahs (seminaries), some husayniyyas (meeting halls), and, notably, the mosque. Thus, "mosques were safe locations for gathering, communication, broadcasting the government's repression, and organizing the opposition nationally through the mosque network."¹⁸

The accumulation of those socioeconomic, political, religious, and cultural discontents created sociorevolutionary political forces in the community. At this point, the 'ulamā' — the religious opposition, equipped with the numerous religious symbols, primarily those of Karbalā' and of Ḥusayn's martyrdom — came to play a major role in legitimizing and mobilizing the revolutionary movement.

Among the 'ulamā' participating in and organizing the revolutionary movement was Khumaynī who, for his refusal to compromise with the Shah's regime, became a major figure and was recognized by the opposition groups as the leader of the revolution, notably as the symbol of the anti-Shah opposition. Because of his charismatic authority, Khumaynī, together with other 'ulamā', was able to mobilize sociorevolutionary forces in an extraordinary series of mass demonstrations and strikes of the middle and working classes, including the unemployed people. In addition, the expectation of his militant supporters and followers of the coming of a

savior to liberate them from their socioeconomic and political predicaments led Khomeynī to be elevated to become the Imām. Thus, as Skocpol suggests, "Imām" Khomeini's role as a continuing central focus for the revolutionary leadership resonated with the popular messianic yearning for the return of the Twelfth Imam [the Mahdī]"¹⁹

Dealing with this thesis, which consists of three chapters, a discussion about Mahdism in Shī'ī theology will be elaborated in chapter 2. In this chapter I attempt to describe the doctrine of the Mahdī which not only became a basic tenet of the creed, but also occupies a central place in Shī'ī eschatological doctrine: the expectation for the return of the Mahdī. Relating to the main idea of this thesis, the chapter functions to provide a historico-theological basis for understanding the Shī'ī sociopolitical movement.

Chapter 3 deals with Khomeynī's position in the Iranian revolution. In this chapter I try to delineate Khomeynī's revolutionary struggle against the Shah's régime. Regarding himself as the forerunner of the Mahdī, in the course of the revolution he extensively employed and politicized the Shī'ī traditional symbolic structure of the Karbalā' paradigm in order to mobilize mass revolutionary political consciousness.

Chapter 4, the last one, deals with Shī'ī religious symbols employed in the course of the revolution. In this chapter I attempt to show how the Karbalā' paradigm or the symbols of Karbala and of Husayn's martyrdom were extensively employed throughout the revolution. In addition, other religious symbols I try to describe during the course of the revolution are religious revolutionary slogans.

N o t e s

¹W. Richard Comstock, "The Study of Religion and Primitive Religions," in W. Richard Comstock, ed., Religion and Man: An Introduction (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1971), 37.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Theda Skocpol, States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China, reprinted (Cambridge, New York, and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 284.

⁵Misagh Parsa, Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 2.

⁶Alan Richards and John Waterbury, A Political Economy of the Middle East: State, Class, and Economic Development (Boulder, San Francisco, and Oxford: Westview Press, 1990), 422.

⁷Ervand Abrahamian, Iran Between Two Revolutions (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982), 530.

⁸Hoosang Amirahmadi, "Middle-Class Revolutions in the Third World," in Hoosang Amirahmadi and Manoucher Parvin, eds., Post-Revolutionary Iran (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1988), 255.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Theda Skocpol, "Rentier State and Shi'a Islam in the Iranian Revolution," Theory and Society 11 (May 1983): 268.

¹²Robert E. Huyser, Mission to Tehran (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1986), 39-50.

¹³Abrahamian, op. cit., 529.

¹⁴Nikki R. Keddie, Roots of Revolution: An Interpretative History of Modern Iran (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 254.

¹⁵ Abdulaziz Sachedina, "'Ali Shari'ati: Ideologue of the Iranian Revolution," in John L. Esposito, ed., Voices of Resurgent Islam (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); Ervand Abrahamian, "'Ali Shari'ati: Ideologue of the Iranian Revolution," in Edmund Burke, III and Ira M. Lapidus, eds., Islam, Politics, and Social Movements (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1988).

¹⁶ Ervand Abrahamian, "Structural Causes of the Iranian Revolution," Merip Reports 87 (May 1980): 24.

¹⁷ Parsa, op. cit., 301-302.

¹⁸ Ibid, 306.

¹⁹ Skocpol, "Rentier State," 278.

II. Mahdism in Shī'ī Theology

The Concept of the Mahdī

Before being employed as a specifically eschatological term in Shī'ī theological doctrine, the term Mahdī was applied to "historical personages"¹ who were considered as charismatic leaders such as al-Khulafā' al-Rāshidūn al-Mahdiyyūn (the divinely rightly guided khalīfahs). The non-eschatological application of the term Mahdī was also employed as an honorific epithet for a leader who was regarded as successful in his leadership such as 'Umar Ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz. In Medina, for example, the conservative religious view generally recognized him as the Mahdī. One of the prominent traditionists in Baṣrah, Abū Kilāba (d. 107/725), agreed with the view that 'Umar Ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz was the Mahdī. In addition, an eminent figure in Baṣrah, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), did not believe in the Mahdī, but said that if there were one, it would have been 'Umar Ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz.² Moreover, as "an honorific epithet without messianic significance, the term Mahdī was employed from the beginning of Islam.... Ḥasan b. Thābit thus applied it to the Prophet.... Sulaymān b. Ṣurad referred to al-Ḥusayn, after his martyrdom, as Mahdī, son of the Mahdī...."³ Besides, with regard to the term Mahdī, Sachedina has pointed out:

The title al-Mahdi ... was, in the beginning, merely a designation for the ideal Islamic ruler. But with the delay in the great social transformation under al-Mahdi's command, the title took on eschatological tones in Imami Shi'ism. The Imamate of the twelfth Imam was unique in the sense that in him merged the two ideas of Shi'ite messianism: the occultation and the return of the future restorer of justice.⁴

As Shī'ī eschatological doctrine, thus the concept of the Mahdī consists of the belief in the Imām Mahdī (divinely guided one) or the Hidden Imām who will reappear at the end of time as a savior realizing sociopolitical justice and equity through which a peaceful life based on the ideals of religious (Islamic) teaching may be reached. In other words, it is believed of the Imām Mahdī that he will realize an ideal religious society. "The belief in the Imam Mahdi becomes not only a basic tenet of the creed, but also the foundation on which the entire spiritual edifice of the Shi'ite rests."⁵ In this relation, thus the belief creates the Shī'ī eschatological doctrine of the expectation of a socioreligious and political situation in the future. In the course of the history of Shī'ī community life, one may interpret that such an eschatological expectation helps to explain the extraordinary resoluteness which the Shī'ah have shown in the face of unbearable sociopolitical circumstances. With respect to the belief in the Imām Mahdī, Sachedina has explained:

He is the victorious Imam who will restore the purity of the faith, which will bring true and uncorrupted guidance to all

mankind, creating an adequately just social order and a world free from tyranny and wickedness. The chiliastic vision of history in Shi'ism continues to be expressed, even today, in terms of radical social protest in the face of political oppression. Had it not been this deep sense of paving the way for the reappearance of the Imam, the Shi'ites would not have felt the need to re-evaluate their social circumstances and the shortcomings of their present lives.⁶

As a matter of fact, from the very beginning the idea of the Mahdī has served as an ideological basis of Shī'ī political protest against social dissatisfaction and socio-political oppression of both the Ummayyad and the 'Abbasid. In addition, "the tradition of the Mahdi grew and developed with the disintegration of the caliphate, both Ummayyad and 'Abbasid, and the flowering and disappointment of successive hopes which the Shi'is had nurtured for the establishment of the ideal rule."⁷

Considering the Shī'ah as a latent force threatening their power, the 'Abbasids always controlled Shī'ī socio-political activities and the lives of the Shī'ī Imāms. In this political situation, the twelfth Imām (Muḥammad b. Ḥasan al-'Askarī) was born in Samarra in mid-Sha'bān 255/868⁸ — some sources vary by as much as one to five years from this date — and until 260/872, when his father was killed, lived under his father's care and tutelage.⁹ These circumstances surrounding the birth of the twelfth Imam led al-'Askarī to save his successor from the oppressive

political structure of the 'Abbasids. He decided to seek a place safer for his son in order to avoid the interference of the 'Abbasids.¹⁰ After he died in 260/872, his son (the twelfth Imām) went into occultation;¹¹ it was believed of him that he was the Mahdī who will appear at the end of time in order to fill the earth with justice, just as it had previously been filled with oppression and injustice.¹²

The title Mahdī seems to have been employed by al-Mukhtar b. Abī 'Ubayd al-Thaqāfī for Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyyah, a son of 'Alī by a woman other than Fāṭimah, "in 66/685-86, in his rebellion against 'Abd Allah b. Zubayr."¹³ Since the movement was a failure, when Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyyah died in 81/700, many of the followers of his revolt did not recognize his death as a reality, and instead continued saying that he was in concealment and would return.¹⁴ Later the followers of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyyah were associated with the Kaysaniyyah sect which held that he was the promised Mahdī.¹⁵

The Kaysaniyyah seem to have been the first Shī'ī sect to employ Mahdistic terms for their Imām. This practice was afterwards maintained by other Shī'ī sects, primarily the Imāmiyyah, in respect to their Imams. "This was the beginning of the two central beliefs in the idea of the

Mahdi, the ghayba (occultation) and the raj'a (return) of the Islamic messiah at the appropriate time."¹⁶ In Shī'ī eschatological doctrine, the return of the Mahdī was identified with the raj'a of the Hidden Imām.¹⁷

The term Mahdī in its eschatological significance was also applied by the Zaydīyyah to their leaders who rebelled against the 'Abbasids, such as Muḥammad al-Nafs al-Zakiyyah (d. 145/762), Muḥammad b. Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 203/818), and Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim al-Ṭāliqān who disappeared in the year 219/834.¹⁸ As for the Twelver Shī'ah, it was al-Nawbakhtī (one of the leading Shī'ī theologians who died at the beginning of the fourth/tenth century) who was the earliest to formulate the Twelver Shī'ī eschatological doctrine of the concealment of the twelfth Imām, the Mahdī. Following al-Nawbakhtī, it was al-Mufīd (one of the leading Shī'ī theologians of the tenth century who died in 413/1022) who developed and systematized the Shī'ī point of view concerning the Mahdī.¹⁹

In Shī'ī eschatological doctrine, in addition to al-Mahdī, the twelfth Imām had many other titles such as Imām al-'Asr (the Imām of the Period), Ṣāhib al-Zamān (the Master of the Age), Ṣāhib al-'Amr (the Master of Authority), Mahdī al-Anām (the Mahdī of the People),

al-Qā'im (he who will Rise), and al-Hujjah (the Divine Proof). All these Mahdistic titles had significances of eschatological expectation and gave expression to the social discontent and political deprivation of the Shī'ah for centuries. In other words, these Mahdistic titles reflected and represented a myth of eventual Shī'ī vengeance against their experience of social injustice and political inequity. So far as the Mahdistic titles are concerned, "the title al-Mahdi, with its eschatological connotation, had much wider recognition than the other titles used for the messianic Imam such as al-Qa'im or al-Hujja."²⁰

In the case of the title al-Qā'im (meaning he who will rise after his death for a great task),²¹ however, the title reflected obviously a myth of Shī'ī eschatological revenge since al-Qā'im "will rise with the sword."²² He thus symbolized an avenger against those who had caused disturbances. According to al-Kulaynī's report, "al-Qā'im will rise with the sword as God's avenger against those who caused troubles to 'Ali and his wife Fatimah. He would also take vengeance against those who were responsible for the suffering of the Imams and their followers, particularly against those who assassinated Husayn."²³ In addition, the Shī'ah also associated al-Qā'im with socio-economic issues such as their dissatisfaction with the feudal economic system of the 'Abbasid state.²⁴

Abū Ja'far claimed that all land belonged to the Shī'ī Imāms; they had inherited the land from God through the Prophet. Thus the Muslims must pay the kharaj (land tax) on all the land they cultivated. When al-Qā'im rises with the sword, the land tax must be paid to him.²⁵ In this context one may deduce that the appearance of al-Qā'im with the sword will mean that the socioeconomic inequity, like the sociopolitical, will be resolved with violence in order to bring about justice and equity. In Shī'ī eschatological doctrine, social justice and equity become the main issue of its idea of the return of the awaited Imām.

In this connection, the accumulation of Shī'ī discontents with the sociopolitical system of the Umayyads and the 'Abbasids led them not only to revolt against the two dynasties, but also generated their eschatological expectations for the future. In other words, the Shī'ī eschatological expectations on which the doctrine of the Mahdī developed rested on their historical experiences in terms of sociopolitical and economic injustice. Thus they entitled their last Imām al-Qā'im (he who will rise with the sword) and Ṣāhib al-'Amr (the Master of Authority); these titles represented the functions which they attributed to the Mahdī Imām. When al-Qā'im rises, he will rule and

fill the earth with justice in his capacity as the Master of Authority. In this regard, the Mahdī Imām was called as al-Qā'im bi al-Imāmah (the one who carries out the duty of Imāmate) and al-Qā'im bi al-Jihād (the one who carries out the duty of the holy war).

In addition to political functions, the Mahdī also has religious duties which were indicated by the title al-Ḥujjah (the Divine Proof). These religious functions of the Mahdī were inherited from the Prophet and his legatees (awṣiyā').²⁶ Thus, the title al-Ḥujjah was not only the designation of him who became the vicegerent of God (khalīfat Allah), but also that of the Prophet (khalīfat al-Rasūl) who guides mankind to the true path in order to give them the knowledge of God and His religion. The final goal of the religious functions of al-Ḥujjah is to bring about the religious society upon which social justice and political equity depend.

In Shī'ī tradition, it is believed that the Imāms have both esoteric and exoteric knowledge. Moreover, the Imāms possess knowledge of the past and of the future.²⁷ These extraordinary capacities of the Imāms lead al-Ḥujjah to be an authority on religious matters. In this respect, Sachedina concludes that "the title al-Hujja, in contrast to other titles which are often used to designate the

twelfth Imam, emphasizes the religious and spiritual aspects of his function, whereas al-Qa'im or Sahib al-amr convey his role as the ideal ruler of Islam who restores Islamic justice in the world."²⁸

Despite the fact that it is unlawful to call the twelfth Imām by his name, ²⁹ his various titles seem not to have been subject to that restriction; rather they were ways to indicate various aspects of mahdistic functions in terms of socioeconomic, political, and religious categories. In this respect, the title al-Mahdī is the central one of the twelfth Imām who will reappear at the end of time as the restorer and savior.

The Occultation of the Hidden Imām

In the course of Shī'ī history, the death of each Shī'ī Imām at every turn generated a serious problem of succession. The death of the twelfth Imām "produced what appears to have been the worst of the crises of succession"³⁰ to the Shī'ī imāmate. This crisis situation occurred not only because of theological debate in Shī'ī 'ulamā' circles to determine who would be the successor of the eleventh Imām (Ḥasan al-'Askarī), but also because

of the 'Abbasid political repression of the Shī'ī Imāms and community. In this regard, Hussain has pointed out:

According to the early Imamite sources al-'Askarī did not leave a publicly acknowledged son, nor did he determine upon or install his successor openly. As al-Mufīd says, the Imamites were suffering oppression at the hand of the 'Abbāsids, while the caliph, al-Mu'tamid, was searching for al-'Askarī's son and trying to arrest him by any means possible. Moreover, the views of the Imamite Shī'a about him were being circulated, and it was becoming known that they were waiting for him to rise. For this reason al-'Askarī had not revealed his son during his lifetime, not even to greater portion of his own adherents.³¹

In this relation, when his son (Muḥammad al-'Askarī) was recognized as the twelfth Imām following his death, there appeared a new problem of political insecurity for the twelfth Imām. This political circumstances, thus, to a certain extent, led the Shī'ī 'ulamā' to formulate a theological doctrine of the occultation (ghaybah) of the twelfth Imām.

In Shī'ī eschatological doctrine, one of the most significant tenets is the doctrine of the occultation. This doctrine is a direct corollary, on the one hand, of the belief that earth cannot be devoid of an Imām (Muḥjah from God) who will guide mankind to the right path³² and, on the other, of the political insecurity of the twelfth Imām. To protect his life and to continue his imamate, the twelfth Imām had to remain in concealment. Thus,

he was permanently able to apply his imamate functions of guiding his adherents through spiritual communication.

Before being accepted as a theological tenet, as has been noted, the doctrine of the occultation become a serious issue of theological disputation among the Shī'ī 'ulamā' over the problem of whether or not the eleventh Imām had left his son³³ as his successor. In fact, from the very time of his birth until it came to be believed that he was the Hidden Imām, the status of the twelfth Imām made many Shī'ah confused. Hence in a number of Shī'ī traditions, the Hidden Imām was well-known as "ghaybah wa hayrah"³⁴ (the occultation and the confusion). To authenticate his birth, Shī'ī traditions contain narratives to vindicate the existence of the twelfth Imām. With respect to this point, Hussain has noted:

The possibility that the twelfth Imam was born and his birth was kept hidden is supported by a number of narrations. The fact that there were already narrations about the twelfth Imam as al-Qā'im al-Mahdī gave rise to other narrations which can only be described as hagiographical. But from the time of al-Ṣadūq onwards, even these were accepted by the Imamites as historical facts. Nevertheless, other early narrations present his birth as a purely historical fact without the embellishment of miraculous reports.³⁵

The historical obscurity of the twelfth Imām from his birth until the present time, reports Kulaynī, is due to the political insecurity in which he lived.³⁶ It

seems to have been the repressive political system of the 'Abbasids restricting Shī'ī sociopolitical activities which compelled the eleventh Imām to conceal the birth of his son from the Shī'ī community in general. It was this state of affairs which may have led the Shī'ī traditionists to report various types of traditions narrating and justifying the birth of the twelfth Imām.

As for the occultation of the twelfth Imām, it is believed that he went into occultation in 260/872³⁷ following his father's death. His occultation, in fact, was a continuation of his political insecurity under the 'Abbasid sociopolitical control. A number of Shī'ī traditions, therefore, report that the occultation of the twelfth Imām is appropriate before he rises for fear of his being killed.³⁸ In this respect, al-Kulaynī reports a theological justification of the occultation: the twelfth Imām went into concealment until he reappears as a severe religious trial from God in order to test His creatures and find out who would remain resolute in recognizing his imamate.³⁹ This theological justification was applied not only to avoid offering a political idea of the occultation of the Hidden Imām, but also to supply a theological basis on which the doctrine of the occultation may rest.

Dealing with nature of the occultation, al-Ṭūsī holds that the twelfth Imām went through two forms of the occultation: al-ghaybah al-qasīrah (the shorter occultation) and al-ghaybah al-tawīlah (the longer occultation). Other terms signifying two kinds of occultation are al-ghaybah al-ṣuḡhrā (the minor occultation) and al-ghaybah al-kubrā (the major occultation) or even al-ghaybah al-tamma (the complete occultation). As for the shorter occultation, al-Ṭūsī goes on, it was known where the twelfth Imām was, but during the longer occultation only God knows. Hence some people speculated that the twelfth Imām died; some of them considered that he was killed; and some others said that he went away.⁴⁰ On the contrary, al-Nu'mānī narrates from Abū 'Abdallāh that those who knew where the twelfth Imām was during his shorter occultation were his special followers (khāṣṣah min Shī'atih), but it is only his élite religious patrons (khāṣṣah mawālīh) who know where he is during his longer occultation.⁴¹ Thus, there appeared a disagreement about the existence of the longer occultation among the Shī'ī theologians. In addition, al-Nu'mānī says:

As for the first ghayba, it is that occultation in which there were the mediators (al-sufara') between the Imām and the people, carrying out (qiyām) [the duties of the Imām], having been designated [by him] living among the people. These were the

eminent persons and leaders from whose hands emanated cures derived from the knowledge and the recondite wisdom which they possessed, and the answers to all the questions which were put to them about the problems and difficulties of religion|. This is the Short Occultation (al-ghaybat al-qasira), the days of which have come to an end and whose time has gone by.⁴²

The second ghayba is the occultation in which the exclusive mediators (askhas al-sufara') of religious affairs passed away for God's will ... as He says [in the Qur'an]: It is not (the purpose) of God to leave you in your present state until He shall separate the wicked from the good. And it is not (the purpose) of God to let you know the ghayba.⁴³

Four exclusive followers of the twelfth Imām who served as mediators between the Imām and the people during the shorter occultation were (1) 'Uthman al-'Amrī (d. 260/916-17); (2) Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. 'Uthman al-'Amrī (d. 304/934-38); (3) Abū al-Qāsim Ḥusayn b. Rūḥ al-Nawbakhtī (d. 326/937-38); and (4) Abū al-Ḥasan Muḥammad b. 'Alī al-Sammārī (d. 329/940-41).⁴⁴ Following them after the death of al-Sammārī, the longer occultation commenced and will endure until the end of time. God alone knows when the Hidden Imām will return.

The period of the shorter occultation was some sixty-nine years. Since the twelfth Imām went into occultation when he was five years old (260/872), the complete occultation began when the age of the Imām was some seventy-four years (329/940-41). With respect to the doctrine of the occultation, it was believed that a week

before the death of al-Sammarī the twelfth Imām issued a pronouncement (tawqī') predicting the time when al-Sammarī would die:

May Allah give good rewards to your bretheren concerning you (i.e. on your death), for indeed you shall die after six days. So prepare your affairs, and do not appoint anyone to take your place after your death. For the second occultation has now occurred, and there can be no appearance until, after a long time when Allah gives His permission, hearts become hardened and the world becomes filled with injustice. And someone shall come to my partisan (Shī'a) claiming that he has seen me; but beware of anyone claiming to have seen me before the rise of al-Ṣufyānī and the outcry from the sky, for he shall be a slanderous liar.⁴⁵

Thus, this pronouncement (tawqī') of the twelfth Imām predicting the death of the fourth mediator functioned as a theological justification of the doctrine of the occultation. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that the complete occultation began following the death of the fourth mediator. At that time the age of the twelfth Imām was some seventy-four years. This situation leads one to speculate that in all likelihood the twelfth Imām died following — if not before — the death of the fourth mediator. Consequently, not only did the mediator institution come to an end, but also there was generated a crisis of religious belief in the doctrine of the occultation. With regard to this point, Sachedina comments:

The period following the death of al-Sammari marked the critical situation of internal resistance to the belief in ghayba [in which] the situation was regarded as inconceivable. The explanation that the Imam had no mediators during the second

occultation indicates the uneasiness felt by the Shi'ite leaders in their attempt to advance a longer than normal life-span for the Imam, who could not communicate with his followers through his personal representatives.⁴⁶

Such a situation led the Shī'ī leaders to formulate a theological justification of the occultation in order to vindicate that the twelfth Imām went into occultation following the death of al-Sammārī (the fourth mediator). The strongest theological argument which was employed to endorse the doctrine of the occultation was that the twelfth Imām went into occultation to satisfy God's will. Vindicating the occultation of the Hidden imām, the Shī'ī leaders employed not only scriptural and traditional proofs (al-dalīl al-sam'ī), but also rational ones (al-dalīl al-'aqlī). As for the Shī'ī traditionists, such as al-Kulaynī and Ibn Bābūyah, they applied mostly al-dalīl al-sam'ī. However, Shī'ī theologians, such as al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, employed chiefly al-dalīl al-'aqlī. In addition, Sachedina says, al-Ṭūsī developed a delicate compromise blending al-dalīl al-sam'ī and al-dalīl al-'aqlī.⁴⁷

Whatever proofs and methods the Shī'ī leaders employed to vindicate the occultation of the twelfth Imām they were endeavoring not only to justify, but also to rationalize it in order that the occultation become a theological doctrine. In this regard, al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā,

for example, attempts to rationalize the obscurity of the occultation when he argues that "the mode of that |ghayba| has not been known in detail, because that is one of the things the knowledge of which has not been imposed on us as a duty. If we have taken it upon ourselves to offer mentioning this, this is an act of supererogation."⁴⁸

In addition, to vindicate the occultation of the twelfth Imām, Ibn Bābūyah and al-Ṭūsī report numerous traditions identifying certain Prophetic stories about Yūsuf, Mūsā, Yūnūs, 'Īsā, Muḥammad, etc., who have disappeared from the sight of their followers for a period of time, with the occultation of the twelfth Imām.⁴⁹ Despite the fact that the stories of certain Prophetic disappearances did not occur in the context of the occultation, Ibn Bābūyah strives to justify and rationalize the matter as follows:

.... Sometimes a person goes into occultation from a city where he is well-known and whose inhabitants were used to seeing him; |at the same time| he is in occultation in respect to some other city |where he is not known or seen|. Sometimes a person is in occultation from one community while he is present for another, or, he is hiding from his enemies and not from his friends, but still he is said to be in occultation and in concealment⁵⁰

Thus the occultation of the twelfth Imām was believed to be a reality, and its formulation as a theological doctrine was accomplished. In this connection, it was believed that the complete occultation would go on for an

unlimited period of time with only God knowing the time when the Hidden Imām will reappear. During this period in which the Hidden Imām has no special mediators or representatives (nuwwāb al-khaṣṣ), "the mediatorship between the Imām and the followers was indirectly assumed by the ruwat, who perform the duties of the special agents of the Imām, without holding the office of the deputyship."⁵¹ Hence the ruwat functioned as the general representatives (nuwwāb al-‘āmm) of the Hidden Imām. As the nuwwāb al-‘āmm, the ruwat were interpreted as being the mujtahids or the marjā’ al-taqlīd. In fact, the institution of the ruwat itself has become a controversial theological issue between the two major groups of the Shī‘ī ‘ulamā’: the Uṣūlīs and the Akhbārīs. It was the Uṣūlīs who endorsed the institution of the ruwat during the period of the complete occultation of the Hidden Imām.⁵²

Apart from a theological controversy, the transformation of the nuwwāb al-khāṣṣ institution into that of the nuwwāb al-‘āmm during the complete occultation indicates that the Shī‘ī community remains in need of certain institutions of the Imāmate in order to perform sociopolitical and religious functions. This demand corresponds with its theological doctrine of the Imāmate according to which the Imām must exist in every period.

Thus, when the Imām disappears, or goes into occultation, a certain institution of his representatives is required. In this respect the nuwwāb al-‘āmm institution is needed. This matter obviously has relationship to the authority of the ‘ulamā’, something that is of great important for the Iranian revolution.

The Expectation for the Return of the Hidden Imām

Vindication of the doctrine of the occultation has a direct corollary which necessitates believing in the return of the Hidden Imām after his complete occultation. In other words, the expectation of his return was inseparable from or a direct consequence of the doctrine of the occultation. In relation to socio-political circumstances, initially, to a certain degree, this expectation corresponds with the repressive political structure of the ‘Abbasids, under which the Shī‘ī community hoped for the coming of a savior (the Hidden Imām). In addition, subsequently such an expectation corresponds with the political disintegration of the ‘Abbasids.⁵³

As a consequence, the collapse of the ‘Abbasids was assumed to be the sign of the return of the Hidden Imām, and "many other events taking place at that time

were identified with the vague prophecies and traditions handed down by the Imams about the days before the Mahdi will appear."⁵⁴ Unfortunately both the signs and the prophecies were mistaken since the Hidden Imām has never reappeared. Hence to perpetuate the authority of the prophecies and traditions of the Imāms, the Shī'ī leaders, such as al-Ṭūsī, widely quoted traditions dealing with the prohibition of trying to determine the time of the return of the Hidden Imām since it is only God who knows.⁵⁵

The extension of an inaccurate early prophecy that the Hidden Imām would come in seventy years to an indefinite time,⁵⁶ in fact, undermined the authority of traditions and theology. Thus to perpetuate their authority and to give a theological justification for their stance, the Shī'ī leaders found it necessary to formulate a specific doctrine, the so-called doctrine of al-badā. In Shī'ī theological doctrine, al-badā means divine alteration. In other words, it was not because of the inaccuracy of the early prophecy that the Hidden Imām did not reappear in the near future, but because of divine alteration, al-badā. The doctrine of al-badā, therefore, was included in the beliefs about Mahdism as a theological justification for prohibiting an effort to fix the time of the return of the Hidden Imām.

Any attempt to determine the time of the Mahdī's reappearance is forbidden, and those who do so are regarded as liars;⁵⁷ those who do not believe in his reappearance are declared to be unbelievers.⁵⁸ The obligation of the people is only to expect and believe in his reappearance. Yet a theological dictum that prohibits fixing the time of the return was unable entirely to prevent the circulation of traditions that prophesied the day of the return of the Mahdī. A number of traditions reports that the Mahdī will return on the day of 'Āshūrā', the tenth of Muḥarram, which will fall on a Saturday.⁵⁹

The emergence of traditions prophesying the day of the Mahdī's reappearance gave added significance to the 'Āshūrā' tradition which was a Mahdistic ritual symbolizing the expectation of the return of the Mahdī. On the occasion of the 'Āshūrā' ritual, the people usually pray to God: "May God grant us great rewards for our bereavement caused by the martyrdom of al-Husayn (peace be on him), and make us among those who will exact vengeance for his blood with his friend (wali) the Imam al-Mahdi, from among the descendants of Muhammad (peace be on him)."⁶⁰

To a certain extent, the 'Āshūrā' tradition was able to bridge the contradiction between the prohibition concerning the fixing of the Mahdī's reappearance at

a certain time and the Shī'ī eschatological expectation of the Mahdī who will take vengeance on his enemies and an unjust world. In addition, the 'Āshūrā' tradition functions as a socioreligious solace to the Shī'ī community for their suffering. Mady would say it is an opiate to dull people's sensitivity to the realities of life. It turns one's eyes away from concrete problems by promising "pie in the sky."

As for prophecy of the day of the Mahdī's reappearance, it is believed that before he reappears on the day of 'Āshūrā' he will be summoned on the twenty-third night of the month of Ramaḍān. In this respect, Ja'far al-Ṣādiq has pointed out:

(A voice) will summon the one who will rise (al-qā'im) on the night of the twenty-third of the month [of Ramaḍān] and he will rise on the day of 'Āshūrā', the day on which al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī ... was killed. It is as if I could see him on Saturday, 10th of the month of al-Muḥarram, standing between the corner (of the Ka'ba) and the station (of Abraham) and Gabriel ... on his right will call for the pledge of allegiance to God. His Shī'a will come to him from the ends of the earth, rolling up in great numbers to pledge allegiance to him. Then God will fill the earth with justice as it was filled with injustice.⁶¹

This tradition was trying to provide a theological justification of the sacredness of the event of the Mahdī's reappearance. As a matter of fact, the twenty-third night of the month of Ramaḍān, "... in the Shī'ī liturgy, is considered to be the laylat al-qadr (The Night of Power

in which the Qur'an was revealed), in which the angels descend with the decrees from God about the events that will take place during that year from God to al-Qā'im, His hujja.⁶²

Furthermore, maintaining the sacredness of the eschatological event, the Shī'ah believe that as the reappearance of the Mahdī nears extraordinary natural phenomena will occur, such as "the rise of the sun from the west, and the occurrence of the solar and lunar eclipses in the middle and the end of the month of Ramadan...."⁶³ Both in Shī'ī and Sunnī communities, in fact, these phenomena are typically believed to be signs of the coming of the day of Resurrection. In addition, another natural phenomenon that will come as a sign accompanying the year of the return of the Mahdī will be twenty-four times of rain bringing about the blessing of God.⁶⁴ These natural phenomena are inextricably a part of the mythical characteristics of the eschatological doctrine.

Another significant theme of the expectation of the return of the Mahdī has to do with the place where the Mahdī will rise. There are three central places that might have been expected to serve for the return of the Mahdī: Karbalā', Kūfah, and Mecca. Karbalā' as the battle-

field of Ḥusayn's martyrdom has become a symbol of Shī'ī redemptive suffering. "Since the significance of the 'Ashura' is tremendous in the pious literature of the Imamites, one would have expected Karbala' ... to have been designated as the most likely place for the messianic Imam to rise and commence his mission of conquering the evil forces obstructing his ultimate establishment of the kingdom of God."⁶⁵

Kūfah, however, was the seat of 'Alī's government. From the Shī'ī political point of view, 'Alī's government was an ideal one, in which 'Alī was considered to be the only Khalīfah who had inherited the legitimate political authority of the Prophet. Thus Khūfah has a specific historical significance in the Shī'ī traditional literature; it symbolizes the ideal Shī'ī capital. To rebuild such a historical symbol, Kūfah was expected to be the place of the Mahdī's rise, and in turn to be the center of the Mahdī's government.

Mecca was the birthplace of Islām. As a restorer, like the Prophet, the Mahdī will come with a new order and will call the people to adhere to that order, as did the Prophet in the beginning of Islām.⁶⁶ In this regard, Abū 'Abd Allāh says:

When God gives the one who will rise (qā'im) permission to come forth, he will go up the pulpit and summon the people to himself. He will commend them to God and summon them to

His truth. He will practise among them the practice (sunnā) of the Apostle of God God, may His majesty be exalted, will send Gabriel ... to go to him. He will come down on the wall of the Ka'ba saying: "what are you calling people for?" The Qā'im ... will inform him. Gabriel will say: "I will be the first to pledge allegiance to you. Stretch out your hand." He will rub it. Three hundred and some tens of men will come to him and pledge allegiance to him. He will stay in Mecca until his followers number ten thousand ... persons. Then he will go to Madīna.⁶⁷

[From Madīna, al-Lāqir says, the Mahdī] will enter Kūfa and there will be three standards which will have become confused. They will be clear to him. He will go in until he comes to the pulpit. Then he will preach, but the people will not know what he says because of the weeping. On the second Friday, the people will ask him to pray the Friday prayer with them. He will order that a place of prostration be marked for him with red dye and he will pray there with them. Then he will order that a river should be dug from the back of the shrine of al-Ḥusayn ... which would flow to the Ghariyyayn so that the water would descend into al-Najaf⁶⁸

In addition to the birthplace of Islam, Mecca, from which the Mahdī was expected to commence his rise, is the Holy City as well. Thus Mecca occupies a central position as an eschatological locus of the Mahdī's rise.

As for Kūfah, since it became 'Alī's seat of government, it is also believed, therefore, to be al-Qā'im's capital. "The Mahdi will rule from Kufa assisted by three hundred and thirteen of his close associates. The first thing that will occur under the rule of the Mahdi will be the islamicizing of the whole world. The followers of all other religions will embrace Islam and profess faith in one God."⁶⁹ Concerning the length of the Mahdī's rule,

however, there is a disagreement in Shī'ī traditions.

In this respect, al-Mufīd has explained:

It is reported that the period of time of the state of the Qā'im will be nineteen years [However] we do not positively assert any one of the two matters (whether the state will be seven or nineteen years) even though the reports about the seven years are clearer and more numerous. there is no state to anyone after the state of the Qā'im ... except that there is a narration of one under the control of his sons, if god wishes that. The majority of reports (maintain) that the Mahdī ... will never depart except forty days before the Resurrection70

One may deduce from these reports that the Mahdī will rise and rule the kingdom of God for some seven years or more prior to the day of Resurrection, and that there will be no other state following that of the Mahdī. In Shī'ī eschatological doctrine, it is held the Hidden Imām will return at the end of time to establish a religious state and to bring about socio-economic and political justice in the earth. Hence the kingdom of the Mahdī functions not only as a messianic kingdom, but also as a solace for the people suffering from unjust sociohistorical experiences.

N o t e s

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³⁶Al-Kulaynī, al-Uṣūl min al-Kāfī, vol. I, 176.

³⁷Al-Ṭūsī, Kitāb al-Ghaybah, 101; al-Nu'mānī, Kitāb al-Ghaybah, 149-150.

³⁸Al-Kulaynī, op. cit., 340; Ibn Bābūyah, Kamāl al-Dīn wa Tamām al-Ni'mah, 157-158; al-Nu'mānī, Kitāb al-Ghaybah, 177.

³⁹Al-Kulaynī, op. cit., 336.

⁴⁰Al-Ṭūsī, Kitāb al-Ghaybah, 101-103.

⁴¹Al-Nu'mānī, Kitāb al-Ghaybah, 170.

⁴²Quoted from Sachedina, Islamic Messianism, 85-86; al-Nu'mānī, Kitāb al-Ghaybah, 173-174.

⁴³Al-Nu'mānī, ibid., 174.

⁴⁴Sachedina, Islamic Messianism, 86; see al-Ghafārī in his annotation to al-Nu'mānī, Kitāb al-Ghaybah, 171.

⁴⁵Quoted from Hussain, The Occultation of the Twelfth Imam, 134.

⁴⁶Sachedina, Islamic Messianism, 99.

⁴⁷Idem, "Treatise on the Occultation of the Twelfth Imamite Imam," Studia Islamica 48 (1978), 116.

⁴⁸Quoted from ibid., 120.

⁴⁹Al-Ṭūsī, Kitab al-Ghaybah, 77-79; Ibn Bābūyah, Ikmāl al-Dīn wa Itmām al-Ni'mah, 317-318.

⁵⁰Quoted from Sachedina, Islamic Messianism, 82-83.

⁵¹Ibid., 107.

⁵²For further information about the disputation between the Uṣūlī and the Akhbārī 'ulamā', see, for example, Andrew Joseph Newman, "The Development and Political Significance of the Rationalist (Usuli) and Traditionalist (Akhbari) Schools in Imami Shi'i History from the Third/Ninth to the Tenth/Sixteenth Century A.D.," (Ph.D. diss. University of California, 1986).

⁵³Sachedina, Islamic Messianism, 151.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵See al-Ṭūsī, Kitab al-Ghaybah, 262.

⁵⁶Ibid., 263.

⁵⁷Ibid., 262.

⁵⁸Al-Nu'mānī, Kitab al-Ghaybah, 86.

⁵⁹See, for example, al-Ṭūsī, Kitab al-Ghaybah, 274.

⁶⁰Quoted from Sachedina, Islamic Messianism, 157.

⁶¹Al-Mufīd, Kitab al-Irshād, 584.

⁶²Sachedina, Islamic Messianism, 158; al-Kulaynī, op. cit., 250-251.

⁶³Sachedina, ibid., 158; al-Ṭūsī, Kitāb al-Ghaybah, 270.

⁶⁴Al-Ṭūsī, ibid., 269; Cf. Ibn Bābūyah, Ikmāl al-Dīn wa Itmām al-Ni'mah, 366.

⁶⁵Sachedina, Islamic Messianism, 159.

⁶⁶Al-Mufīd, al-Irshād li al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, 364.

⁶⁷Idem, Kitāb al-Irshād, 551.

⁶⁸Ibid., 549.

⁶⁹Sachedina, Islamic Messianism, 174.

⁷⁰Al-Mufīd, Kitāb al-Irshād, 554.

III. Khumaynī as a Symbol of the Revolution

How Khumaynī Regards Himself

Before I attempt to delineate Khumaynī's view of himself, I would like to look back on his background. Āyatullāh Ruḥullāh Khumaynī was born in Khumayn, a small town some hundred miles to southeast of Tehran, on 20 Jumadā al-Thānī/24 September 1902¹ and died on 3 June 1989. He was from a family with a strong background of religious life and tradition. Both his grandfather, Sayyid Aḥmad, and father, Āyatullāh Mustafā, were religious scholars. His grandfather was known as al-Hindī because of the length of time he had spent in India.²

When his father died, Khumaynī was five months old. From that time his mother Hajar and his parental aunt Ṣahiba were responsible for his early upbringing. In 1918, at the age of sixteen, "he lost both mother and aunt in the course of a single year, and the task of supervising his education then fell to an elder brother, Sayyid Murtaza."³ By the age of fifteen, he had finished his Persian studies and was ready to continue to study Arabic and Islamic studies.⁴ Then, by the age of nineteen, "Khomeini was sent to study the religious sciences in the

nearby town of Arak under guidance of Shaykh Abd al-Karim Ha'iri,"⁵ and in 1926 he completed the stage of curriculum in Shari'a, Ethics, and Spiritual Philosophy (Hikmat). In addition, he also studied 'Irfān (Taṣawwuf or Islamic Mysticism), Fiqh, and Uṣūl (Islamic Jurisprudence). In 1929, at the age of twenty-seven, he began his teaching career. At the same time, he wrote a treatise on Ethics and Spiritual Philosophy in Arabic: Miṣbah al-Hidāya (the lamp of Guidance), which attracted his teachers.⁶

In addition to Ethics, he also taught Islamic Jurisprudence and Philosophy, but his lectures on Ethics drew the largest audiences. The fact that his lectures on Ethics were attracting the people is understandable, since he strove to correlate ethical matters with the sociopolitical ideas. At that time, Rizā Khān was launching his sociopolitical modernization program. Yet until the 1940s and 1950s, Khumaynī remained distantly removed from the political movements. During these years, his major activity was teaching Islamic Jurisprudence.

The fact that Khumaynī remained aloof from political involvement during these periods is very interesting to note. During the 1950s, for example, the major reason for his aloofness was "the restraining hand of his patron, Boroujerdi, who continued throughout the 1950s to give

valuable support to the Shah."⁷ In 1960, however, Burūjirdī protested against the land reform proposal of the Shah.⁸ When Burūjirdī died in 1961, Khumaynī had the opportunity to become a central figure replacing Burūjirdī. Following Burūjirdī's death there appeared a crisis over religious leadership and authority,⁹ and this situation allowed him the possibility to play an influential role as a revolutionary figure.

When Burūjirdī died, there was no one who could claim to be outstandingly superior to other mujtahids in his knowledge. In Qum there were Āyatullāhs Sharī'atmadarī, Gulpāygānī, and Mar'ashī-Najafī; in Mashhad, Āyatullāh Muḥammad Hādī Mīlānī; in Tehran, Āyatullāh Aḥmad Khwānsarī; and in Najaf, Āyatullāhs Khū'ī, 'Abd al-Hādī Shīrāzī, al-Kāshīf al-Ghiṭā, and Muḥsin al-Ḥakīm. The last mentioned received the largest support, but was unable to consolidate his position sufficiently among the 'ulamā' of Qum, in order to be recognized as the sole marja,¹⁰ On 23 January 1963, four days before the referendum about the White Revolution, the 'ulamā' organized a demonstration in which Khumaynī was one of the most influential 'ulamā' involved. The government accused Khumaynī as one of those who had ordered the boycott of the referendum. At the same time, the Shah made a statement

that the 'ulamā' were "black reactionaries." On 23 March 1963, the political upheaval led to an attack by government forces on the Fayḍiyya Madrasa in Qum. Consequently, on the occasion of the fortieth day after the assault on Fayḍiyya Madrasa, Khumaynī delivered a declaration in Qum on 3 April 1963, stating, in part:

I have repeatedly pointed out that the government has evil intentions and is opposed to the ordinances of Islam. One by one, the proofs of its enmity are becoming clear. The Ministry of Justice has made clear its opposition to the ordinances of Islam by various measures like the abolition of the requirement that judges be Muslim and male; henceforth, Jews Christians, and the enemies of islam and the Muslims are to decide on affairs concerning the honor and person of the Muslims. The strategy of this government and certain of its members is to bring about the total effacement of the ordinances of Islam. As long as this usurpatory and rebellious government is in power, the Muslims can have no hope for any good.

I don't know whether all these uncivilized and criminal acts have been committed for the sake of the oil in Qum, whether the religious teaching institution is to be sacrificed for the sake of oil. Or is all this being done for the sake of Israel, since we are considered as obstacle to the conclusion of a treaty with Israel directed against the Islamic states? In any event, we are to be destroyed. The tyrannical régime imagines that through these inhuman acts and this repression it can deflect us from our aim, which is none other than the great aim of islam — to prevent oppression, arbitrary rule, and the violation of the law; to preserve the rights of islam and the nation; and to establish social justice.¹¹

It was his strong criticism of the government at the time which contributed most to his growing reputation. Thus the events of the 1960s were the decisive and the turning point for Khumaynī to become a central

figure. From 1963 onwards, he was the most outspoken Āyatullāh who criticized the government. In consequence, on 5 June 1963 he was arrested and incarcerated until August, 1963. Upon being released from prison, he continued his outspoken criticism of the Shah and was eventually exiled to Turkey in November 1964, and in October 1965 he was moved to Najaf.¹² Thirteen years later, in September 1978, the Shah requested the Iraqi government to expel Khumaynī from its territory, and in October of the same year Khumaynī went to France where he remained until 1 February 1979, when he "returned triumphantly to Iran to preside over the creation of an Islamic republic and to demonstrate his authority over all other potential leadership: the more liberal constitutionalist leadership of Ayatullah S. Muhammad-Kazem Shariatmadari, the more socialist-leaning S. Mahmud Taleghani, the lay leadership of Engineering Professor Mehdi Bazargan, or the would-be heirs of Dr. Ali Shariati."¹³

In the course of the 1970s, during which he spent his life in exile, Khumaynī showed his great ability to manipulate the sociopolitical situation by organizing and mobilizing the social forces in order to revolt against the Shah's dictatorship. In this period, he became a central figure and a symbol of the anti-government feeling

of the community. His political strategy of anti-compromise with the government generated a social conviction in the community that he had launched a revolutionary political manoeuver through which the fall of the Shah was anticipated.

This social conviction was based not only on his anti-compromise attitude and his political extremism, but also in his own personality. His ascetic style of life symbolized an anti-extravagant stance towards the luxurious living of the Shah's régime. "His spartan style of life won him popular standing among people who were sick of the style of the corrupt and luxury-living politicians."¹⁴ The fact that he was a spiritual leader gave him a charismatic authority that secular leaders lacked. In addition, "Khomeini's supporters among the mullahs said that he ... showed his selflessness and otherworldliness, which was confirmed by his refusal to let his followers address him by any extraordinary titles even in print."¹⁵

With respect to Khumaynī's personality, Fischer says: "Dimensions of Khomeini's persona are the cultivation of a legend of distress that connects his life to that of Imam Husayn; the cultivation of mysticism and ascetism; the populist language; and the flexibility of his arbitration style of decision-making."¹⁶ The

populist language, for example, was important in mobilizing the lower classes. His personal asceticism was important in defusing complaints of corruption in the government.¹⁷ Summarizing Khomeynī's personality, Fischer notes:

In sum, Khomeini's persona draws on a series of traditional images in a forceful way none of the other top ulama can match. Like Hosayn, he represents perseverance for justice against all odds, with an ability to endure injustice and suffering. Like Ali, Khomeini represents combining political and religious leadership and utilizing all means at hand, including force and cunning on behalf of Islam, the Muslim community, and the just society. Like the imams, Khomeini represents access to wisdom and ability to control the dangers to ordinary men of dabbling in esoteric knowledge or in power.... Khomeini's persona appeals on three levels: to the senses as a forceful, uncompromising, ... suffering man of justice; to the reason as a shrewd tactician, with a sense of timing, with a populist appeal, and as the man who kept the revolution from failing; and to the spirit as providing a sense of tragedy and a sense of what is worth dying for, drawn from an anger at a traditional way of life which must be transformed to survive.¹⁸

One may deduce from his personality, at least during he was living in exile, that Khomeynī was not an Āyatullāh who struggled to be a ruler. Thus, those who have regarded him as a Mullāh who thirsted to be the ruler are contradicted by his personality. Moreover, someone who searches to discover whether he regarded himself as an Imām has no easy task. Was it possible for him to regard himself as an Imām? It is very hard to believe that he did so even though Moosa mentions that "at one time Khomeini called himself Sahib al-Zaman (master of time), an epithet exclusively used by Ithnaashari

Shiites for the twelfth Imam, the Mahdi."¹⁹ On the other hand, the fact that Khomeynī's followers called him the Imām was self-evident, as Arjomand has shown:

Khomeini's militant followers were calling him the imam in Persian by 1970. The acclamation of Khomeini as Imam by his followers was a startling event in Shi'ite history in Iran. Never since the majority of Iranians had become Shi'ite in the sixteenth century had they called any living person Imam. The term had hitherto only been used in reference to one of the twelve imams and its connotations in the mind of the Shi'ite believers as divinely guided, infallible leaders undoubtedly worked to build up Khomeini's charisma. It did so especially by being suggestive of a link between Khomeini and the Hidden Imam of the Age, the Lord of the Time.²⁰

The elevation of Khomeynī as Imām and the expectation of his followers of the coming of a savior to liberate them from their socioeconomic and political predicaments led to controversies by 1978, particularly among his uneducated followers, "as to whether he was in fact the Mahdi or merely his forerunner."²¹ Furthermore, according to Arjomand: "On at least one televised occasion, Khomeini was asked by a Majles deputy from Tehran, with a confirmed habit of comparing Khomeini with Abraham and other Prophets, whether or not he was in fact the Mahdi. Khomeini conveniently observed noble silence."²² Notwithstanding, eventually "Khomeini opted for the milder claim and let currency be given to the idea that he was the forerunner of the Mahdi."²³

Thus, to legitimize his authority, it was not necessary for Khumaynī to claim himself to be the mahdī, as Shāh Ismā'il, the founder of the Safawid dynasty, had done. Without any claim that he was the Mahdī, the authority had already been given into his hand. Regarding himself as the forerunner of the Mahdī meant that Khumaynī had paved the way for the reappearance of the Mahdī. This combination of his revolutionary political struggle with his claim to be forerunner of the Mahdī may be regarded as his claim for historical responsibility for the leadership of the Shī'ī community.

Khumaynī as the Imām and the Symbol of the Revolution

In terms of sociological point of view, the concept of the "Imām" in Shī'ī theological doctrine may be defined to be the charismatic leader in Weber's sociological conceptualization. According to Weber:

The term 'charisma' will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader.

Sociological analysis ... will treat all these on the same level as the men who ... are the 'greatest' heroes, prophets, and saviours.²⁴

The Shī'ī community believe that their Imāms have, more or less, such qualities. In the case of Khumaynī, his militant followers have regarded him as having supernatural qualities²⁵ and a great personality. In addition, during the 1970s there existed legends surrounding the figure of Khumaynī, as Fischer has shown:

It is said that when he was first invited to join the Qum hawza, he did a simple divination (*istikhara*) with the Qur'an and it indicated that he would die in Qum, sign enough that he should move there. Khomeini's followers took this as evidence that although exiled to Iraq, he would return to Qum, for he was fated to die there; and indeed he did return in 1979. This waiting for the return of the *marja'*-ī *taglid* led to elaborations of similarities between 'Imam' Khomeini and the awaited twelfth Imam, who will usher in an era of justice before the final judgement.²⁶

Thus, in terms of Weber's sociological category, Khumaynī may be regarded to be a charismatic leader. Furthermore, "Charismatic founders of revolutionary and religious movements emerge in environments of acute social crisis," and the existence of which is "a prime prerequisite for the emergence of charismatic leadership and the concomitant spread of revolutionary movements of both religious and ideological nature."²⁷ In the course of the Iranian revolution, "Khomeini was able to carry out this revolutionary transformation of the Shi'ite tradition in part because of his charismatic authority."²⁸

In addition, the creation of his charismatic authority in part is because of his militant followers called him the Imām in 1970. In terms of the Mahdistic movement, that appellation may be "transformed into a mythical symbol of the hidden Imam."²⁹ Khumaynī's charismatic authority allowed him to serve as the symbol of the eschatological expectation of the return of the Mahdī as the savior.

On the other hand, newspapers and intellectuals disagreed with the elevation of Khumaynī to the position of the Imām.³⁰ Thus Khumaynī's charisma was well-entrenched, primarily, among the lower class and the middle- and lower-level bazaaris. In terms of the social level of religious tax payers, for example, one may see that "the upper echelon paid religious taxes to Ayatollahs Khonsari, Sayyed Mohammad Kazem Shariat-Madari, and Sayyed Abolghasem Khoie, while some middle- and lower-level shopkeepers paid taxes to Ayatollah Khomeini."³¹ In general, however, during the Iranian revolution Khumaynī was supported by the bazaaris, and he was regarded by them as a revolutionary figure. In this respect, Parsa has pointed out:

Bazaaris supported Ayatollah Khomeini and respected him as the revolution's leader for several important reasons. They considered Khomeini an indomitable fighter against "despotism." ... Khomeini was the only religious or political leader who

continuously called for the overthrow of the Shah and refused to compromise with him. Bazariis also supported Khomeini because he consistently condemned the Shah's dictatorial rule as well as the moral decadence and corruption of the Pahlavi dynasty. Throughout the revolutionary period, he promised political freedom to all social groups under an Islamic government. Khomeini also advocated social justice, which bazaaris found lacking under the Shah's régime. Finally, Khomeini attacked imperialist plundering of Iranian wealth. These statements were widely supported within the bazaar because they reflected bazaaris's own central concerns.³²

In point of fact, Khumaynī's revolutionary program became a central concern of other social groups as well, especially those who came from the lower class. In his populist language and rhetoric, by means of which he mobilized the masses, Khumaynī addressed the lower class as the mustad'afīn — "a loose term used to depict the general populace: the meek, the poor, the masses, the powerless, the disinherited, the exploited, the dispossessed, and, for some, the sansculottes and the wretched of the earth."³³

The growing of the mustad'afīn caused by Iranian socioeconomic crisis happened, primarily, from 1975. A rapid urbanization, for example, was another indication of such a crisis. According to Hooglund, "... at least 2 million villagers may have migrated to cities just in the decade 1966-1976."³⁴ The migrants became a part of the urban poor community. This lower class became Khumaynī's chief supporters, to whom his radical rhetoric

and his revolutionary speeches were addressed. In this respect, Abrahamian notes:

In his public statements, Khomeini increasingly used radical-sounding phrases as 'Islam belongs to the Mostazafin'; 'A country that has slums is not Islamic'; 'We are for Islam, not for capitalism and feudalism'; 'In a truly Islamic society, there will be no landless peasants'; 'Islam will eliminate class differences'; 'The lower class is the salt of the earth'; 'Islam represents the shanty town dwellers, not the palace dwellers'; and 'The ulama and the mostazafin are the true bastions against the corrupt West, against the pagan (taghutti) Pahlavis, and against those who spread gharbzadegi' [awe-struck by the West].³⁵

Thus, as has been noted, Khomeynī's charismatic authority and his strength of personality, supported by his ability to articulate his views in populist language and his radical rhetoric, in turn, generated not only the sociopolitical response and endorsement of the masses, but also served to establish his position as the Imām and the symbol of the revolution. On the Tāsū'ā commemoration, a day before that of 'Āshūrā, 10 December 1978, millions of demonstrators were asked by the speakers to approve a 17-point revolutionary program which included recognition of Khomeynī as the Imām, abolition of the monarchy, the establishment of social justice, and the establishment of an islamic state.³⁶

In Tehran, on the day of the 'Āshūrā commemoration, 11 December 1978, the large demonstration continued. The slogans shouted by the massive crowds were such as:

"The only party is God's party! The only leader is Khomeini!"... "Neither communism nor imperialism; only the Islamic Republic!" "The beauty of life is freedom! The blossoming of freedom is equality!...."³⁷ In addition, "... the religious opposition offered a charismatic leader |Khumaynī| to symbolize its unity against the Shah."³⁸

On 29 August 1978, the clerical community of Mashhad issued a political statement. One of its demands was for the return of Āyatullāh Khumaynī. Similarly, on 2 December 1978, "pro-Khomeini clerics in Qum held a mourning ceremony ... and issued a public statement" in which one of the points was a demand for the immediate return of Khumaynī.³⁹

In terms of the clerical reaction to the revolutionary situation, according to Abrahamian, there were three major factions. The first faction consisted of the apolitical 'ulamā', headed by Āyatullāhs Khū'ī Najafī, Āyatullāh Aḥmad Khurāsānī, and Āyatullāh Mar'ashī Najafī. This faction considered that the 'ulamā' should avoid political affairs and should concentrate on religious matters, such as teaching within the seminaries, and preparing the future generation of the 'ulamā'.

The second faction comprised the moderate 'ulamā' opposition, headed by Āyatullāh Muḥammad Riḍā Gulpāygānī,

Āyatullāh Hādī Mīlānī, and, the most important, Āyatullāh Kāẓim Shari'atmadarī. This faction did not strive to overthrow the Shah's régime but instead sought the establishment of a constitutional monarchy based on the 1905-1909 fundamental laws. Thus, although this faction "opposed the régime, especially on the questions of women's suffrage and land reform, it preferred to keep open channels of communication to the Shah, use these channels to moderate government policies, and lobby as much as possible behind the scenes to protect the vital interest of the religious establishment."

The third faction was composed of the militant 'ulamā' opposition, headed by Āyatullāh Khumaynī, Āyatullāh Ḥusayn Muntazirī, Ayatullah Ḥusayī Bihistī, Āyatullāh Murtaḍā Muṭahharī, Ḥujjat al-Islām Akbar Hashimī Rafsanjānī, and Ḥujjat al-Islām 'Alī Khāmini'ī. In fact, Khumaynī's faction "can be described as extremist"⁴⁰ since this faction was anti-compromise with the Shah's régime in order to establish the Islamic government based on the Vilāyat-i Faqīh doctrine. Thus, as Abrahamian says, Khumaynī "sought the creation of not just an Islamic government, but a clerical Islamic government."⁴¹

Furthermore, it is not sufficient to mention Khumaynī's charismatic authority without mentioning

also the socioreligious structure of the Shī'ī community in the period of the revolution and the mechanism for spreading the revolutionary messages. In this respect, Stempel has pointed out:

A very significant aspect of the development of the revolutionary movement was the steadily increasing participation of Iran's Shi'ite Islamic organization. There are approximately 80,000 to 90,000 mosques and 180,000 to 200,000 clerics in a population of 35 million. By mid-1977 the growing need of the opposition to communicate gave the religious structure a special importance. The swiftest and the most reliable way to pass the message to leaders in another city was through the "mosque network" organized by the senior clergy. Simultaneous demonstrations in various cities during 1978 were coordinated this way, either by messenger or by phone calls between trusted contacts. For example, ... clergy loyal to Khomeini were attached to the mosque in north Tehran supervised by Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti. He would serve as the principal contact between Tehran and Paris when Ayatollah Khomeini moved to the French capital from Iraq in October 1978.⁴²

Although there was clerical factionalism, one may speculate that the majority, if not all, of the revolutionary masses recognized Khomeynī as their leader. Thus, as Esposito says, "the opposition, secular and religious, regardless of political outlook and orientation, united to an unprecedented degree with Khomeini as its symbol. Islamic ideology, symbols, and the ulama-mosque infra-structure formed the core of the revolution."⁴³ In agreement with this point, Abrahamian notes:

... Khomeini intentionally propagated a vague populist message and refrained from specific proposals, and thereby created a broad alliance of social forces ranging from the bazaars

and the clergy to the intelligentsia and the urban poor, as well as of political organizations varying from the religious Liberation movement and the secular National Front to the new geurilla emerging from Shari'ati's followers in the universities.⁴⁴

This broad alliance of social forces, in turn, elevate Khomeynī to be the symbol of the revolution. "Khomeini became a symbol that had different meanings for different of Iranian society."⁴⁵ His significance depended on what the social interests at stake may have been. In consequence, Khomeynī could be a symbol of religious, political, economic, or cultural interests. As a religious symbol, Khomeynī was the Imām. For "the more traditional Iranians, ... Khomeini was above all a deputy of the Hidden Imam, a Godly man, a righteous idol smasher and the personification of all traditional values violated by the Shah."⁴⁶ As a political symbol, Khomeynī was an extremist revolutionary figure who was against compromise with the Shah's régime. As an economic symbol, Khomeynī was an ascetic, and his asceticism was important in defusing complaints of corruption in the government and against luxury-living politicians.⁴⁷ As a cultural symbol, Khomeynī was "... cultural authenticity. He was the 'real' Iran of the mosque and the bazaar."⁴⁸

Thus, one may not dispute that Khomeynī was unanimously recognized as the symbol of the revolution. In addition, the fact that he was the marja'-i taqlīd since 1963 gave him an institutional charismatic authority, and, therefore, "whatever he said must be done without question."⁴⁹ At this point, even the intellectuals and the upper class, who did not recognize Khomeynī as the Imām,⁵⁰ could not escape such religious (Shī'ī) institutional regulations. In addition to his personality, it was Khomeynī's position as the marja'-i taqlīd and his identification with the socioreligious, political, economic, and cultural symbols that enabled him to attain a great charismatic authority.

How Khomeynī Employed Religious Symbols

As has been noted, the combination of Khomeynī's charismatic authority with his ability to use populist language and radical rhetoric in mobilizing the masses created great revolutionary sociopolitical forces. In addition, Khomeynī's ability was also supported by his utilization of religious symbols. In the course of the 1960s and the 1970s, he extensively employed the central themes of the Karbalā metaphor and the paradigm

of Husayn's martyrdom. "The metaphor of the arch-tyrant and destroyer of Islam, Yazid, standing for the Shah," for example, was used throughout this period.⁵¹

From 1963, and notably following the White revolution event, Khumaynī was the most outspoken Āyatullāh who condemned the Shah's régime. Manipulating the sacred time and event of the 'Āshūrā ritual, on the tenth of Muḥarram (3 June 1963) he delivered his speech of reproach at the Fayḍiyya Madrasa in Qum. "He began with a rawzeh, a rhetorical form, normally occurring at the end rather than the beginning of a sermon or preachment, which elicits weeping and is intended to instill in listeners a stoical determination to re-dedicate themselves to the principles of Islam no matter what the odds and external pressures:⁵²

It is now the afternoon of 'Ashura. Sometimes when I recall the events of 'Ashura, a question occurs to me: If the Umayyads and the régime of Yazid ibn Mu'awiya wished to make war against Husayn, why did they commit such savage and inhuman crimes against the defenseless women and innocent children? What was the offense of the women and children? What had Husayn's six month-old infant done? The audience cries.⁵³ It seems to me that the Umayyads had a far more basic aim: they were opposed to the very existence of the family of the Prophet. They did not wish the bani Hashim to exist and their goal was to root out this "goodly tree."⁵⁴

A similar question occurs to me now. If the tyrannical régime of Iran simply wished to wage war on the maraji, to oppose the 'ulama, what business did it have tearing the Qur'an to shreds on the day it attacked Fayziya Madrasa? Indeed, what business did it have with the madrasa or with its students, like the eighteen year-old sayyid who was killed?

[The audience cries.] What had he done against the Shah, against the government, against the tyrannical régime? [The audience cries.] We come to the conclusion that this régime also has a more basic aim: they are fundamentally opposed to Islam itself and the existence of the religious class. They do not wish this institution to exist; they do not wish any of us to exist, the great and the small alike.⁵⁵

From this speech one may see how successful Khomeynī was in manipulating the sacred time and event of the 'Āshūrā' ritual, in generating deep emotion and weeping in the audience. In consequence of his fearless speech, "early the next morning, Khomeini was arrested. Thousands of people in cities all over Iran protested."⁵⁶ The 15th day of Khordad (5 June 1963) became a turning point in Khomeynī's revolutionary struggle.

Upon his release from house arrest, Khomeynī again delivered a public speech. "He began with the Quranic verse: "From God we come and unto God we shall return," i.e. I cannot be intimidated. Again he utilized rawzeh techniques, eliciting tears and emotional responses":⁵⁷

Never have I felt incapable of speaking, but today I do, for I am incapable of expressing my anguish, anguish caused by the situation of the Islam in general, and Iran in particular, the events of the past year, and especially the incident in Madraseh Faisiyeh. I was not aware of the incident of the 15th Khordad. When my imprisonment was commuted into house arrest, I was given news from the outside. God knows the events of the 15 Khordad devastated me. [Audience cries.] Now that I have come here from Qeytariyeh, I am confronted with sad things: little orphans [audience cries], mothers who have lost their young ones, the women who have lost their brothers [much cries],

lost legs, sad hearts — these are the proofs of their "civilization" and our being reactionaries. Alas we do not have access to the rest of the world; alas our voice does not reach the world. Alas the world cannot hear the voice of these mourning mothers. |Much crying.|⁵⁸

One may say, in an anthropological framework, that Khumaynī — with his rhetorical speech — was utilizing and manipulating the idioms of the popular religion. Fischer says: "One key to the popular religion and the relation between the masses and the clergy is the form of preaching called rowzeh."⁵⁹ "The rowzeh begins with a verse of the Quran; a sermon follows; and at the end the subject of the sermon is connected to the story... of the martyrdom of Husayn...."⁶⁰

Khumaynī himself followed Ḥusayn's paradigm, to which he called attention when said: "The Lord of the Martyrs |Imām Ḥusayn| ... summoned the people to rise in revolt by means of sermon, preaching, and correspondence and caused them to rebel against a monarch."⁶¹ In this respect, Wright notes: "Khomeini modeled his beliefs and his later campaign on Hosain paradigm. 'Every day is Ashura and every place is Karbala' was one of his rallying cries."⁶² "Khomeini has survived the goal of self-sacrifice as a means of achieving Islamic goals...."⁶³

Supporting this point, Stempel says: "Some of Khomeini's power came from his known willingness to martyr himself for the Islamic revolution. He was not afraid to die if it would help bring about the Shah's downfall."⁶⁴ This willingness to become a martyr was affirmed by Khomeini himself: "We are ready to be killed and we have made a covenant with God to follow the path of our leader, the Lord of the Martyrs."⁶⁵

Mobilizing the masses, Khomeini tried to transform processions and the passion plays of the 'Āshūrā' ritual (ta'ziya) into revolutionary sociopolitical forces. "In 1978 Khomeini had invoked the distinction between passive weeping and active witnessing and fighting for Husain's cause, and so he called for suspension of flagellations, processions and passion plays in favor of political marches and mobilization against the Shah."⁶⁶ In some respects, Khomeini's attempt to transform the traditional 'Āshūrā' ritual to become more political is in accord with Sharī'atī's ideas of Islam.

On 23 November 1978 Khomeini delivered his declaration, Muharram: The Triumph of Blood Over the Sword, from Neuchâtel-Château, France, one week before the beginning of Muharram:

The leader of the Muslims taught us that if a tyrant rules despotically over the Muslims in any age, we must rise up against him and denounce him, however unequal our forces may be, and that if we see the very existence of Islam in danger, we must sacrifice ourselves and be prepared to shed our blood.

Now the régime of the Shah is ruling tyrannically over our oppressed people today. He continues to rule in defiance of the law and the wishes of the people, who have risen up against him throughout Iran, and he threatens the higher interest of the Muslims and the dictates of Islam with imminent destruction for the sake of his own satanic rule and his parasitic masters. It is the duty of the entire nation that has now risen in revolt to pursue and broaden its struggle against the Shah with all its strength and to bring down his harmful, disastrous régime.⁶⁷

On 15 January 1979, two weeks before he returned to Iran, Khomeyni intensified his use of the metaphor and paradigm of Husayn's martyrdom, calling for continued demonstrations. According to him, "the fortieth-day commemoration of Imam Husayn has an exceptional and ideal meaning this year."⁶⁸ It is our religious and national duty to organize great marches and demonstrations on this day."⁶⁹

The fortieth day after the anniversary of the martyrdom of the leader of the oppressed and the Lord of the Martyrs, Imam Husayn, ... has now arrived. The upright and conscious people of Iran have observed many such days of mourning. What disasters and inhuman crimes we have witnessed this year, following on fifty years of usurpation rule by the Pahlavi dynasty! All fifty years have been bitter and painful, but most bitter and painful of all have been the past twelve months and more in which our courageous people have risen up against tyranny and imperialism. This year, the commemoration of the fortieth day after the anniversary of the Imam's martyrdom has come in the midst of a whole series of fortieth day commemorations of the martyrdom of the followers of that great Islamic figure. It is as if the blood of our martyrs were the continuation of the blood of the

martyrs of Karbala, and as if the commemoration of our brothers were the echo of the commemoration of those brave ones who fell at Karbala. Just as their pure blood brought to an end the tyrannical rule of Yazid, the blood of our martyrs has shattered the tyrannical monarchy of the Pahlavis.⁷⁰

It became clear in the course of the revolution that the rhetorical device of reiterating the Karbalā metaphor and the paradigm of Ḥusayn's martyrdom was a very powerful means to mobilize the masses to become sociorevolutionary forces. Throughout the seventies, Khumaynī succeeded in transforming the ethico-religious ritual of the 'Āshūrā festival into a revolutionary struggle. In other words, in the course of the revolution Khumaynī successfully politicized the Shī'ī socioreligious ritual tradition. Moreover, in general, Khumaynī transformed "Shi'ism from a religio-political tradition into a revolutionary ideology (which, in turn, involved a fundamental shift in its logical structure)."⁷¹ In this respect one may argue that, to a certain extent, Khumaynī was influenced by Sharī'tī's revolutionary thought.

Khumaynī had used religion not only as a device of political legitimacy but also as a political ideology. It is self-evident that Khumaynī, in his revolutionary ideology, had used Shī'ism as a basis for political legitimacy and political ideology. In terms of general

theoretical framework, Kertzer notes: "Many of the most powerful symbols of legitimacy are of religious origin. It should come as no surprise, then, that new political forces eagerly rummage through the preexisting body of religious rituals and symbols to find those that will enrich their own ritual forms."⁷²

Khumaynī's success in utilizing religious symbols and in articulating the rhetorical device of the Karbalā' metaphor and the paradigm of Ḥusayn's martyrdom was helped by the activation of the latent Mahdistic expectation of the community caused by the socio-religious, economic, and political disillusionment. Being recognized as the Imām and considering himself to be the forerunner of the Mahdī, in turn, allowed him to establish his charismatic authority. In this respect, the position of Khumaynī may be considered that of a messianic leader who activated the Shī'ī Mahdistic tenet. With regard to this point, Arjomand has pointed out:

The mahdistic tenet, when fully activated, has been shown to render the ethically rationalized normative order inoperative. Pending possible affirmation by the claimant to mahdistic authority, ethical tenets are suspended, and ethically undisciplined extremist religiosity is channeled into chiliastic action under charismatic leadership.⁷³

Notes

¹Hamid Algar, "Imam Khomeini, 1902-1962: The Pre-Revolutionary Years," in Edmund Burke and Ira M. Lapidus, eds., Islam, Politics, and Social Movements (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1988), 266.

²Hamid Algar, "Introduction," in Imam Khomeini, Islam and Revolution, trans. and annot. by Hamid Algar (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), 13.

³Ibid.

⁴Hamid Algar, "Imam Khomeini," 276.

⁵Idem., "Introduction," loc. cit.

⁶Dilip Hiro, Iran Under the Ayatollahs (London and New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 50.

⁷Ervand Abrahamian, Iran Between Two Revolutions (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982), 425.

⁸Moojan Momen, An Introduction to Shi'ism: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi'ism (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), 248.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid. ¹¹Khomeini, op. cit., 175-176.

¹²Hamid Algar, The Roots of the Islamic Revolution (London: The Open Press, 1983), 43.

¹³Michael M.J. Fischer, "Imam Khomeini: Four Levels of Understanding," in John L. Esposito, ed., Voices of Resurgent Islam (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 160.

¹⁴Dilip Hiro, op. cit., 2.

¹⁵Roy Mottahedeh, The Mantle of the Prophet: Religion and Politics in Iran (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 187-188.

¹⁶Michael M.J. Fischer, "Repetitions in the Iranian Revolution," in Martin Kramer, ed., Shi'ism, Resistance, and Revolution (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1987), 123.

¹⁷Ibid., 123-124.

¹⁸Idem, "Becoming Mollah: Reflections on Iranian Clerics in a Revolutionary Age," Iranian Studies 13 (1980): 112; "Imam Khomeini," 162.

¹⁹Matti Moosa, Extremist Shiites: The Ghulat Sects (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1988), 99.

²⁰Said Amir Arjomand, The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 101.

²¹Ibid., 152.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Max Weber, The Theory of Social and Economic Organization, trans. by A.M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York: The Free Press, 1964), 358-359.

²⁵Arjomand, loc. cit.

²⁶Michael M.J. Fischer, Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 1980), 177-178.

²⁷R. Hrair Dekmejian, "Charismatic Leadership in Messianic and Revolutionary Movements," in Richard T. Antoun and Mary Elaine Hegland, eds., Religious Resurgence: Contemporary Cases in Islam, Christianity, and Judaism (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 78-79.

²⁸Arjomand, op. cit., 100.

²⁹Robert Graham, Iran: The Illusion of Power (London: Croom Helm, 1979), 223.

³⁰Fischer, Iran, 212; Ali Reza Sheikholeslami, "From Religious Accommodation to Religious Revolution: The Transformation of Shi'ism in Iran," in Ali Banuazizi and Myron Weiner, eds., The State, Religion, and Ethnic Politics: Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986), 235.

³¹Misagh Parsa, Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 108.

³²Ibid., 122.

³³Ervand Abrahamian, The Iranian Mojahedin (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), 22; Ali Rahmena and Farhad Nomani, The Secular Miracle: Religion, Politics and Economic Policy in Iran (London and New Jersey: Zed Book Ltd., 1990), 6.

³⁴Eric J. Hooglund, Land and Revolution in Iran, 1960-1980 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 147.

³⁵Abrahamian, The Iranian Mojanedin, 22.

³⁶John D. Stempel, Inside the Iranian Revolution (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 150.

³⁷Parsa, op. cit., 213.

³⁸Stempel, op. cit., 44.

³⁹Parsa, op. cit., 203-204.

⁴⁰Abrahamian, Iran Between Two Revolutions, 473-475.

⁴¹Ibid., 476.

⁴²Stempel, op. cit., 476.

⁴³John L. Esposito, Islam and Politics, 3rd ed. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 203; Rahmena and Nomani, op. cit., 10.

⁴⁴Abrahamian, Iran Between Two Revolutions, 479; H.E. Chehabi, Iranian Politics and Religious Modernism (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1990), 307.

⁴⁵Henry Munson, Jr., Islam and Revolution in the Middle East (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 132.

⁴⁶Ibid., 133.

⁴⁷Fischer, "Repetitions in the Iranian Revolution," 123-124.

⁴⁸Munson, loc. cit.

⁴⁹Fischer, Iran, 212.

⁵⁰Cf. Robert E. Huyser, Mission to Tehran (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1986), 268.

⁵¹Fischer, "Imam Khomeini," 154.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³All sentences in the parallel brackets stating "the audience cries" are quoted from Fischer, "Imam Khomeini," in which he quoted Khumaynī's speech from Mehdi Abedi's translation, Zendegi Nameh Imam Khomeini.

⁵⁴Khomeini, op. cit., 177.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Fischer, "Imam Khomeini," 156.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Mehdi Abedi, op. cit., cited in Fischer, *ibid.*

⁵⁹Fischer, "Becoming Mollah," 106.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Khomeini, op. cit., 204.

⁶²Robin Wright, In the Name of God: The Khomeini Decade (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 48.

⁶³Idem, Sacred Rage: The Crusade of Modern Islam (London: Andre Deutsch, 1986), 38.

⁶⁴Stempel, op. cit., 267.

⁶⁵Khomeini, op. cit., 305.

⁶⁶Fischer, "Imam Khomeini," 170.

⁶⁷Khomeini, op. cit., 242-243.

⁶⁸In Shī'ī tradition, mourning ceremonies were held not only on the day of somebody's death, but also notably on the fortieth day. In terms of Ḥusayn's martyrdom — who was killed in the battle-field of Karbalā on 10 Muḥarram 60/680 — its commemoration ceremony was also held both on the tenth day of the month of Muḥarram (the so-called 'Āshūrā') and on the fortieth day, or even at later times as well.

⁶⁹Khomeini, op. cit. 249.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Gregory Rose, "Velayat-e Faqih and the Recovery of Islamic Identity in the Thought of Ayatollah Khomeini," in Nikki R. Keddie, ed., Religion and Politics in Iran: Shi'ism from Quietism to Revolution (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 167.

⁷²David I. Kertzer, Ritual, Politics, and Power (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 45.

⁷³Arjomand, The Shadow of God and the Hidden Imam, 82.

IV. Religious Symbols Employed in the Course of the Revolution

The Symbols of Karbalā and of Husayn's Martyrdom

One of the most interesting and significant parts of culture is symbolic structure. Symbols differ from signs and metaphors. A sign constitutes a relation between a word or other signal and one meaning or reference; a metaphor forms a relation between two references; a symbol generally has more than two references.¹ In other words, symbol has gradation and is more complex in meaning than sign and metaphor. "One of the important objectives in dealing with symbolic structure (sets of interrelated symbols) is to control the complex resonances that a particular symbol, action, or statement has for the actor or speaker."² Dealing with this anthropological framework, Fischer attempts to define Shi'ism as follows:

Shi'ism ... and its several forms of expression, such as preachments, passion plays, and the curricula and debates of the madrasa, can be viewed as cultural forms composed of symbolic structures. Within this perspective Islam is not a set of doctrine that can be simply catalogued. It is a "language," used in different ways by different actors in order to persuade their fellows, to manipulate situations, and to achieve mastery, control, or political position. There are in Iran at least four main styles of using Shi'ism: The popular religion of the villages and bazaars; the scholarly religion of the madrasas or colleges where the religious leaders are trained; the mystical counterculture of Sufism; and the privatized, ethical religion of the upper classes.³

In the course of Shī'ī history, the sociopolitical language of Shī'īsm dealing with the symbolic structures of Karbalā and Ḥusayn's martyrdom was frequently employed by the popular religion, the scholarly religion (the 'ulamā'), and the religion of the upper or ruling classes. Under the Pahlavi dynasty, which was launching the sociocultural and political modernization of the country, the religion of the upper classes no longer employed such symbols. According to Thaiss: "Throughout the history of Islamic Iran the symbol of Ḥusayn has been used as a rallying point for national political unity especially in times of social change. The symbol was already used in the seventh century as a focal point in Shī'ī opposition to the Ummayyad and later the 'Abbasid dynasties."⁴

The first public mourning ceremonies of 'Āshūrā were conducted at the command of Sulṭān Mu'izz al-Dawla, the Buyid, in Iraq in 963.⁵ Similar ceremonies appeared in Syria in the Ḥamdānid court, in Egypt during the Fāṭimid reign, and later in Iran in the Safawid period.⁶ Under the rule of Mu'izz al-Dīn Allāh (970), for example, the Shī'ī community in Egypt carried out the 'Āshūrā ceremony.⁷ In the sixteenth century, ceremonies of the Muḥarram festival gained the court patronage of the Safawids. In this period, according to Chelkowski, commemoration

of Ḥusayn's martyrdom became a patriotic as well as religious act.⁸ Moreover, under the Safawid dynasty the symbol of Ḥusayn was described in the work Rawḍat al-Shuhadā' (Garden of Martyrs) mythologizing the drama of Karbalā. Since then such works have become the standard source for present day narrations.⁹ In the nineteenth century, under the Qajars, the dramatization of the Karbalā ceremony and the symbol of Ḥusayn were stressed in opposition to the growing influence of the Western sociopolitical hegemony and the loss of spiritual and national integrity.¹⁰

Thus, from the Buyid period, the symbols of Karbalā and of Ḥusayn's martyrdom have been employed in order to achieve the sociopolitical interests of the ruling classes and the religious élites (the scholarly religion). The extensive application of such symbols by the religious élites began from the Qajar period onwards. At the level of the popular religion, the tragedy of Karbala and Ḥusayn's martyrdom might have been conceived not only as symbols of the struggle against sociopolitical inequity, but also as the symbols of suffering righteousness. These symbolic structures are concerned with the fundamental problem of meaning. As Thaïss says, "that the just and righteous may suffer and fail while the

'ungodly' may prosper. But why do men suffer? Why is there evil in the world? Religion — or more specifically religious symbols as culturally constituted defense mechanisms — are developed and elaborated to deal with these problems."¹¹

With respect to religious symbols of suffering, Geertz has furnished a theoretical framework:

As a religious problem, the problem of suffering is, paradoxically, not how to avoid suffering but how to suffer, how to make of physical pain, personal loss, worldly defeat or the helpless contemplation of others' agony something bearable, supportable — something, as we say, sufferable. The problem of suffering passes easily into the problem of evil, for if suffering is severe enough it usually, though not always, seems morally undeserved as well, at least to the sufferer.

The problem of evil ... is in essence the same sort of problem of or about bafflement and the problem of or about suffering.... inexorable pain and enigmatic unaccountability of gross iniquity all raise the uncomfortable suspicion that perhaps the world, and hence man's life in the world, has no genuine order at all.... And the religious response to this suspicion is in each case the same: the formulation, by means of symbols, of an image of such a genuine order of the world which will account for, and even celebrate, the perceived ambiguities, puzzles and paradoxes in human experience.¹²

In the Shī'ī historical context, one may employ Geertz's theoretical framework to understand the mourning ceremonies in connection with Ḥusayn's martyrdom which reflected a suffering tradition based on sociological and religious values. Under Safawid patronage, for example, the ceremonies were emphasized both to socialize and to internalize

religious values of suffering in order to build national and spiritual integrity , on the one hand, and socio-historical consciousness on the other. In other words, with the establishment of the Safawid dynasty, under which Shī'īsm become the state religion of Iran, the Muḥarram mourning ceremonies were transformed into a process of religio-cultural internalization. In this regard Baktash says: "In place of former conflicts between opposing sects [Shī'ī-Sunnī], the Shi'a mourning processions now competed with each other, using various fanatical pretexts for hostility, so that each group appeared to the other as its imagined enemy. Real battles were fought, and people were injured and even killed."¹³ In this drama, the battlefield of Karbalā is artificially reconstructed in order to imitate and identify with Ḥusayn's fight against Yazīd.

As an example of mourning processions in the Safawid period, Baktash refers to Antonio de Gouvea, the Spanish priest, who came to Persia during the reign of Shāh 'Abbās I, and wrote in 1602-3 of his research in Shīrāz:

During the ten days of Muharram, processions of people shouting "Shah Hussein Alas Hussein!" roam the lanes and chant dirges. Some of these processions are armed while others are not. A lot of the people carry bludgeons five or six cubits long in their

hands and frequently they split into two groups and attack each other. They fight so vigorously that commonly several are killed.¹⁴

One may argue that under Safawid patronage the Muḥarram mourning ceremonies were not only interiorized to become a socioreligious and cultural tradition, but also functioned politically as a means of legitimacy. In other words, its political patronage of the ceremonies means that the Safawid court attempted to show to the Shī'ī community that the government supported the Shī'ī socioreligious and cultural tradition. As Thaiss says: "In the mythologizing of the tragedy of Husayn ... and the reenactment of these events in ritual in Iran today, the political dimension is stressed. The persistence of this ritual over time is attributable to the reflective nature of that ritual vis-à-vis the contemporary society — whether it be Umayyad, Abbasid, Safavid, Qajar, or Pahlavi."¹⁵

Under the Pahlavis, after Reza Shah banned such ceremonies in large cities, as in the city of Yazd in 1963, the Muḥarram mourning ceremonies "moved to such large villages as Meybod, Zarch, and Ardekan."¹⁶ Thus the ceremonies, which had been continuously conducted since the time of the Buyids in 963, experienced a process of sociocultural marginalization or ruralization. By doing as he did,

Reza Shah endeavored to depoliticize the ceremonies. His policy was followed by his son, Muḥammad Reza Pahlavī. In addition, rapid modernization and secularization under the Pahlavīs, primarily from the 1960s onwards, led to the ta'ziyeh becoming more secular in its performance. Beeman notes: "the performance material was being rapidly expanded into a series of nearly secular themes which were not necessarily presented during the month of Muharram at all."¹⁷

Moreover, the ta'ziyeh became a "commercial enterprise."¹⁸ Beeman cites an example showing that "fees paid to performers in 1977 ranged between \$100 and \$700, to which tips from guests were often added."¹⁹ Although the ta'ziyeh regained state support from 1965 until early 1977, the support was given only to its art form. During this period, no less than fourteen presentations of ta'ziyeh were conducted in connection with the Festival of Arts. Because of fear of possible political effects generated by those ta'ziyehs, "for the months of Muharram and Safar in 1977 a strict prohibition against ta'ziyeh performances was again announced"²⁰ by the government.

However, the government's efforts to depoliticize the drama of Ḥusayn's martyrdom (ta'ziyeh) were unsuccessful. One of the fundamental reasons for their failure was that

the symbols of Karbalā and of Ḥusayn's martyrdom had already become part of the Shī'ī sociocultural and religio-political language which was established in the form of ritual and myth. Whenever they are required in a certain socio-political situation to generate mass mobilization and movement, the symbols of Karbalā and Ḥusayn's martyrdom are activated. In the course of the revolutionary marches of 1978-1979, mass political rituals in revolt against the Shah's régime extensively employed religious symbols. In addition, specific symbols of the Muḥarram mourning rituals were also activated. In this regard, Hegland says: "In years preceding the revolution, participants in the mourning rituals of 'ashura had struck their chests and beat their backs with chains while chanting mourning couplets and crying in unison, "Husain, Husain, Husain." In contrast, during the revolutionary processions of 'ashura 1978, marchers raised their fists to beat the air, marking the phrase Marg bar Shah (Down with the Shah)."²¹

The great number of people participating in the mass political ritual of the 'Āshūrā processions -- proclaiming themselves ready to become martyrs -- on the one hand, and the general mass revolutionary demonstrations, on the other, created sociopolitical and revolutionary forces which paralyzed the morale of the Shah's troops.

Analyzing the role of the Muharram mourning rituals in creating and mobilizing the mass revolutionary forces, some scholars, such as Hegland and Chelkowski, have tried to argue that the rituals had been changed in their traditional meaning to become more ideological and political. Hegland suggests:

... "ideological changes, i.e. changes in the interpretation of the meaning of the Ashura rituals and myth, brought about invisible, internal changes. They brought about a transformation in self-image, in views of the world, in perceptions about power, and in motivations and goals. The ideology of revolution, in conjunction with the old Ashura rituals, not only subverted support in terms of manpower to benefit the side of the revolutionary movement, but it also subverted the legitimizing myth of Hosain's martyrdom and its associated rituals and symbols.²²

Chelkowski says: "In the Iranian revolution of 1978-9, the Muharram processions tradition was converted into a cogent political weapon."²³ One may suggest that these changes were in accordance with the appearance of transformation of quietist Shī'ī socio-political and cultural attitude into that of activism.

Reconstructing mass revolutionary ritual in dramatic words, Chelkowski says:

Rhythmically striking their breasts with their hands, the demonstrators — more than a million strong — march along the main avenues of Tehran. Those in the lead, dressed in white burial shrouds, chant the story of the mutilation and massacre of Muhammad's grandson Hussein.... As they sing, they intersperse their litany with a list of wrongs suffered by the Iranian people under Shah Muhammed Reza Pahlavi.

The hands cease beating chests and clench into fists. The mournful groan, "Hussein is dead, Hussein has been killed," changes into an angry shout, "Down with the Shah!"

Suddenly, the "ratat" of machine-gun fire is heard. White shrouds are spattered with blood as victims fall on the streets. Men pause to dip their hands in the blood spilled on the pavement, and the procession continues. Now the clenched fists open, and bloody palms are raised above the crowd. Filled with hatred, the shouting becomes piercing.²⁴

The noteworthy thing in this description is the willingness and readiness of the demonstrators, notably those wearing the white shrouds, to be martyrs. Why did they choose and prepare themselves to be martyrs? According to Fischer: "The theme of martyrdom was of course central to the revolution. Husayn is the martyr par excellence. His martyrdom, in the passive version of Karbala, provided an intercessor for ordinary mortals at the last judgement. In a more active interpretation, his martyrdom is the model for others to emulate: through struggle on the side of good one achieves heaven without need of any intercessor. Since martyrs are said to go to heaven, one need not mourn their deaths as one does those of ordinary people. The symbolism of martyrdom was thus omnipresent."²⁵

As a matter of fact, one may argue that the theme of martyrdom deals not only with the eschatological expectations of achieving heaven without need of any

intercessor, but also with the problem of suffering. In other words, in addition to religious motivation, the socioeconomic and political difficulties suffered by the people often become an ancillary reason — if not the major one — for them to participate in a holy war or a religious rebellion to become martyrs. In the course of the revolution, those who participated in mass demonstrations came mostly from the lower social class and groups, and were people who had deeply suffered from socioeconomic and political dissatisfactions. One may speculate that those who showed themselves ready to be martyrs in the mass revolutionary political rituals originated mostly from these same social classes and groups. Thus the theme of martyrdom may also have to do with socioeconomic and political considerations.

Revolutionary Slogans

A revolution requires a symbolic language of slogans that functions to evoke a revolutionary consciousness in the masses as part of a process of communicating and spreading its messages. Another function of the revolutionary symbolic language of slogans is to manipulate and to promote mass participation in the revolutionary marches. In practice, such slogans frequently appear in general

mass communication symbols and mass media: the press, magazines, radio, and T.V. Because these mass media were entirely controlled by the government, the revolutionary groups manipulated the smaller media. Fischer and Abedi suggest: "the "small media" of the Iranian revolution — jokes, songs, tapes, leaflets, graffiti, repartee, cartoons, and posters --- reveal important changes of consciousness and sociological positioning."²⁶

In addition, traditional channels of communication, notably public meetings or other meetings at which the revolutionary groups might spread their messages and organize their resistances,²⁷ played a central role in the Iranian revolution. One of the central meeting places for organizing revolutionary political force was the mosque. "Denied the outlets of free newspapers, political parties, labour unions, student organizations, and free speech, opponents of the régime gravitated toward the... forum that remained open to them."²⁸ Thus, the mosque network functioned to serve the revolutionary media or to facilitate the communication of the revolution.

Among the religious revolutionary slogans, despite the fact that "God-Qur'ān-Khumaynī" eventually became the national slogan,²⁹ the symbol of Ḥusayn, blood, and

martyrdom remained of central importance. The following are examples of religious revolutionary slogans. In terms of the God-Qur'ānic slogans, besides "lā ilāh illa Allāh" (there is no god but God) and "Allāh Akbar" (God is Great), some Qur'ānic verses, such as: "Naṣr min Allāh wa Faṭḥ Qarīb" (when help comes from God, victory is nigh) became important. In full sentences, these slogans were incorporated into other themes: "Oh Imām of the Time, come to rescue us from our King killing our youth, Allāh! Allāh! Naṣr min Allāh"; and Naṣr min Allāh wa Faṭḥ Qarīb, down with this deceitful monarchy." These slogans might be interpreted as meaning that the opponents suffered from a psychological barrier and political powerlessness to confront the government. Consequently, they utilized their fatalistic attitude to call upon divine providence in order to overcome their disability. Surrendering themselves to God meant that they were ready to face whatever would happen. In becoming so, they transformed their psychological fear into audacity. In addition to hope for God's help, they also manipulated an eschatological expectation of the Hidden Imām (Imām of the Time) of intercession, or even of expectation of reappearance of the Hidden Imām himself. At this point, to a certain extent, one may suggest that the Iranian revolution employed Mahdistic symbols.

Another theme of the Qur'ānic slogans, for example, was "inna Allāh yuḥibb al-ladhīna yuqātīlūn fī sabīl Allāh ṣaffan ka annahum bunyān marṣūṣ (verily God loves those who fight for His sake in [battle] ranks as if they were a solid structure). One may deduce that this slogan infers the Iranian revolutionary struggle to be a holy war between the believers (the Shī'ī community) and the unbelievers (the Shah's régime). This slogan by implication was inseparable from the theme of martyrdom. In other words, those who were killed in the revolutionary marches — as long as they were Muslims — might be considered as martyrs.

The slogans dealing with the symbols of Ḥusayn which were incorporated into Khumaynī's revolutionary figure, for instance, were: "Our movement is Ḥusaynī, our leader is Khumaynī"; "The flower of the flower of Ḥusayn is Āyatullāh Khumaynī"; "Ḥusayn's blood boils over, Khumaynī is uproarious"; and "Iran has become Karbalā', the leader is solely the Spirit of Allāh" [Rūḥ Allāh Khumaynī]. These slogans were attempting to form a mass consciousness that the Iranian revolutionary struggle was similar to that of Ḥusayn in the battlefield of Karbalā'. Thus, those who participated in the revolutionary demonstrations metaphorically were fighting against Yazīd.

Recognizing Khumaynī as the symbol of Ḥusayn facilitated the transformation of the mass consciousness of the Karbalā' metaphor. Khumaynī's revolutionary figure and the related symbols, I have described in chapter 2.

Other central slogans dealt with the theme of blood and martyrdom, such as: "We swear by the blood of the martyrs that we will kill you the Shah"; "Blood wins over the sword"; "Oh martyrs, your blood is the way leading us to our freedom";³⁰ "The flower of religion, I shall water with my blood."³¹ The theme of blood is an integral part of the symbols of Karbalā' and Ḥusayn's martyrdom. Blood is also a symbol of innocence. "In the revolution of 1977-1979, young men wearing shrouds placed themselves between the mass of marchers and the army tanks...."³² When they were shot and fell on the street as victims, people participating in the marches immersed their hands in the blood shed on the street, and bloody palms were raised above the crowd. Such a way of acting whipped emotion into anger. At this point, mass revolutionary rage could not be controlled by the Shah's troops. One of the slogans says: "Now, tanks and machineguns are useless."

This slogan was proven to be true. By December 1978, for example, a number of troops refused to shoot

the demonstrators. The Washington Post disclosed that "five hundred soldiers and twelve tanks in Tabriz joined the opposition, and three Imperial Guards fired a hail of bullets into their officers' mess hall, killing an unknown number of royalists."³³ It was also "reported that soldiers in many towns were joining the demonstrators."³⁴

N o t e s

¹Michael M.J. Fischer, Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution (Cambridge, Mass. and London Eng.: Harvard University Press, 1980), 4.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Gustav Thaïss, "Unity and Discord: The Symbol of Husayn in Iran," in Charles J. Adams, ed., Iranian Civilization and Culture (Montreal: Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, 1973), 116; Cf. Mahmoud Ayoub, "Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspect of 'Ashura in Twelver Shi'ism in the Middle Ages" (Ph. D. diss., Harvard University, 1975), 308-309.

⁵Mayel Baktash, "Ta'ziyeh and its Philosophy," in Peter J. Chelkowski, ed., Ta'ziyeh: Ritual and Drama in Iran (New York: New York University Press and Soroush Press, 1979), 96; Michel M. Mazzaoui, "Shi'ism and Ashura in South Lebanon," in ibid., 231.

⁶Ayoub, op. cit., 310.

⁷Baktash, op. cit., 98.

⁸Peter J. Chelkowski, "Ta'ziyeh: Indigenous Avant-Grade Theatre of Iran," in idem., ed., op. cit., 3; Idem., "When Time is no Time and Space is no Space: The Passion Plays of Husayn," in Milla Cozart Riggio, ed., Ta'ziyeh: Ritual and Popular Beliefs in Iran (Hartford: Trinity College, 1988), 14.

⁹Thaïss, loc. cit.; Samuel Peterson, "Ta'ziyeh: Parts and Plays in Worship," in Riggio, ed., ibid., 25.

¹⁰Thaïss, loc. cit.

¹¹Ibid., 115.

¹²Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in W.A. Lessa and E.Z. Vogt, eds., Reader in Comparative Religion: An Anthropological Approach, 2nd ed. (New York, Evanston, and London: Harper & Row Publishers, 1965), 211.

¹³Baktash, op. cit., 103.

¹⁴Ibid., 103-104.

¹⁵Gustav Thaiss, "Religious Symbolism and Social Change: The Drama of Husain," in Nikki R. Keddie, ed., Scholars, Saints, and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle East since 1500 (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), 364.

¹⁶Michael M.J. Fischer and Mehdi Abedi, Debating Muslims: Cultural Dialogues in Postmodernity and Tradition (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 12; Vladimir Minorski, "Iran: Opposition, Martyrdom, and Revolt," in G.E. Von Grunebaum, ed., Unity and Variety in Muslim Civilization (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1955), 198; William O. Beeman, "A Full Arena: The Development and Meaning of Popular Performance Traditions in Iran," in Michael E. Bonine and Nikki R. Keddie, eds., Modern Iran: The Dialectics of Continuity and Change (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), 366.

¹⁷William O. Beeman, "Cultural Dimensions of Performance Conventions in Iranian Ta'ziyeh," in Chelkowski, ed., op. cit., 26.

¹⁸Chelkowski, "Ta'ziyeh," 9.

¹⁹Beeman, "A Full Arena," notes 32, 443.

²⁰Ibid., 366-367.

²¹Mary Hegland, "Two Images of Husain: Accommodation and Revolution in an Iranian Village," in Nikki R. Keddie, ed., Religion and Politics in Iran: Shi'ism from Quietism to Revolution (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 232.

²²Idem, "Ritual and Revolution in Iran," in Myron J. Aronoff, ed., Cultural and Political Change, Political Anthropology 2 (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Books, 1983), 95.

²³Peter Chelkowski, "Iran: Mourning Becomes Revolution," Asia 3 (1980): 37.

²⁴Ibid., 30.

²⁵Fischer, Iran, 214.

²⁶Michael Fischer and Mehdi Abedi, "Revolutionary Poster and Cultural Signs," Middle East Report (July-August 1989), 30.

²⁷Hamid Mowlana, "Technology Versus Tradition: Communication in the Iranian Revolution," Journal of Communication 29 (Summer 1979), 109.

²⁸Ibid.; Cf. Asghar Fathi, "The Role of the Islamic Pulpit," Journal of Communication 29 (Summer 1979), 102-106.

²⁹The Dawn of Islamic Revolution (A Publication of the Ministry of Islamic Guidance: Tehran, 1982), 9.

³⁰These slogans are based on an eyewitness report of the Iranian revolution of 1979 provided by Mohammad Doustdar Haghighi. When the revolution broke out, he was 25 and was a student at Faculty of Law, National University of Iran, Tehran. Since 1991 he has been a graduate student at Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, Montreal.

³¹"Iran at the Brink," Newsweek (18 December 1978), 40, cited in William A Dorman and Mansour Farhang, The U.S., Press, and Iran (Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California, 1987), 167.

³²Fischer and Abedi, Debating Muslims, 168.

³³Cited in Ervand Abrahamian, Iran Between Two Revolutions, (Princeton, New Jersey: Princetoon University Press, 1982), 523.

³⁴Ibid.

V. C o n c l u s i o n

Islām-state relations or the interplay between Islām and politics is exceedingly complex. But in the relationship between Islām and resistance, Islam may play a double role: "that of conferring legitimacy upon the leadership of a movement, and that of providing the ideological basis for unusual forms of cooperation...."¹ To this general theoretical statement of Clancy-Smith may be added another role: that of opposing change and of putting obstacles in the way of an established régime that seeks to transform a society. In other words, as far as the relationship between Islām and resistance is concerned, Islām may also perform the conservative role of opposing social change, modernization, and secularization. This theoretical framework may be applied to the role of Shī'ism in the Iranian revolution. The role of Shī'ism in conferring religious legitimacy upon the leadership of the revolution, for example, was central. In addition to its conservative role, Shī'ism provided the ideological basis of support for the national revolutionary leadership which was able to accommodate and unify various socio-political forces of opposition. The success in doing so, in turn, led to the generation of massive revolutionary

forces. In the words of Hegland: "Shiism provided a framework with which to organize a political interest group."²

In terms of revolutionary leadership, it was Khomeynī who was recognized on a cross-class basis to be the leader and symbol of the revolution. On the popular level, his charismatic authority allowed him to become the symbol of the mahdistic expectation of the lower class people of Iran who yearned for a savior from their socioeconomic and political predicaments. In accord with this eschatological expectation of the people, Khomeynī promised to liberate them from the tyrannical régime in socioeconomic and political terms. Consequently, he was not only recognized as the leader of the revolution, but also recognized as the Imām. In this respect, one may speculate that the mahdistic idea and symbol, at least to a certain degree, contributed to the Iranian revolution. Thus the doctrine of the Mahdī -- which became a basic tenet of the creed and occupied a central place in Shī'ī eschatological doctrine: the expectation for the return of the Mahdī -- may supply a latent historico-theological basis of the Shī'ī sociopolitical movement.

In addition, the recognition of Khomeynī as the Imām was helped by his ability not only to utilize the

Shī'ī symbolic structure of the Karbalā' paradigm, but also by his ability to activate the latent mahdistic expectation of the community. In other words, the elevation of Khumaynī to become the Imām may be interpreted as the process of manifestation of the latent function of the mahdistic tenet. In order to become fully activated or manifest in a certain revolutionary situation, the latent function of the Mahdī concept requires a powerful figure for its focus, which in the case of the Iranian revolution it found in the person of Khumaynī. The latent function of the mahdistic tenet was compatible with the Uṣūlī doctrine, according to which the 'ulamā' function as the nuwwāb al-ʿāmm (the general representatives) of the Hidden Imām, the Mahdī. Thus the political legitimacy of Khumaynī's revolutionary leadership was derived from the Uṣūlī doctrine. His capacity to launch a powerful revolutionary political movement rested not only on his strong personality, but also on his presentation of Shī'ī theological doctrine as a source of the ideological basis for his revolutionary movement.

Furthermore, Lubeck suggests that Islamic political movements "usually involve Islamic cultural symbols, Islamic criteria of legitimacy, and Islamic-sanctioned goals."³ These elements were extensively present in the

Iranian revolution. The highly centralized regime of the Shah which eliminated political freedom and broad participation of the community in the political process led to the generation of a cross-class based political reaction. In addition, the Shah's program of rapid modernization and secularization of the traditional socio-religious order evoked the emergence of religious opposition. To mobilize support for political reaction against the régime the opposition groups required effective symbols to buttress the movement. In the context of the Iranian community, in which Shī'ism had for four centuries been the formal religion of the state and had become an element of national identity, Shī'ī religious culture offered powerful symbols. The vigorous participation of a radical segment of the religious class in the resistance movement was an important element in giving a foremost role to traditional Shī'ī symbols. After all, the use of such symbols was in their interest and fostered their efforts to gain control of the revolution which they eventually did. Shī'ī religious symbols were employed to legitimize the revolutionary political movement against the repressive political régime of the Shah. According to Hegland: "During the course of the revolution, the language and ethos of Shiism served as a political idiom

of protest and revolt."³ As we have seen among the religious symbols which were extensively invoked to generate and mobilize mass revolutionary consciousness to revolt against the Shah's régime were those of Karbalā' of Ḥusayn's martyrdom, and of the Imām and of the Mahdī.

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¹Julia Clancy-Smith, "Saints, Mahdis, and Arms: Religion and Resistance in Nineteenth-Century North Africa," in Edmund Burke, III, and Ira M. Lapidus, eds., Islam, Politics, and Social Movements, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1988), 61.

²Mary Elaine Hegland, "Islamic Revival or Political and Cultural Revolution?: An Iranian case Study," in Richard T. Antoun and Mary Elaine Hegland, eds., Religious Resurgence: Comparative Cases in Islam, Christianity, and Judaism (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 194.

³Paul Lubeck, "Islamic Political Movements in Northern Nigeria: The Problem of Class Analysis, in Burke and Lapidus, eds., op. cit., 246.

⁴Hegland, op. cit., 196.

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